

RICE UNIVERSITY

**The Victorian Religious Novel:
Conversion, Confession, and the Marriage Plot**

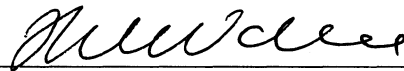
by

Eun Young Koh

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:



Helena Michie, Professor of English,
Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor in
Humanities



Robert L. Patten, Professor of English,
Lynette S. Autrey Professor in
Humanities



Jeffrey J. Kripal, J. Newton Rayzor
Professor, Department Chair Religious
Studies

HOUSTON, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

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Eun Young Koh

Victorian scholars of fiction have hitherto largely overlooked that fiction was an important site for Victorian authors and readers to engage in open discussion of religious issues in the Victorian period, often known, even to itself, as the “Age of ‘Faith and Doubt.’” Along with sermons and religious tracts, which often directly addressed popular audiences, fiction became one of the most popular arenas for debating theology and religious practices. My project aims to revive interest in the religious novel genre by defining the genre, positioning it within its cultural context, and looking at how it engages in active and reciprocal conversations with other genres, fictional and nonfictional. This new approach reveals how the religious novel, long derided or ignored by critics, often leads the way with narrative innovations. Most interestingly, the religious novel, whose alternative name is tellingly the “theological romance,” embraces and adopts one of the most popular plot lines of the Victorian novel tradition, namely the marriage/courtship plot, and develops it into the post-marriage plot, a plot that focuses on and examines marital life. The marriage plot serves, for many of these novels, in place of detailed theological arguments as a way of producing and embodying conversion. The religious novel actually anticipates changes in the nineteenth-century novel by expanding the plot beyond courtship and marriage.

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Chapter 1

“What Do Novels Have to Do with Theology?”

“What do novels have to do with theology?” is the rhetorical question with which J. Russell Perkin opens his recent book *Theology and the Victorian Novel* (3). In the next sentence he provides one “obvious answer to this question”: “not very much” (3). Perkin goes on to explain, “Of all the literary genres, the novel is the most this-worldly” and, for that reason, “it is customary to link the rise of the novel with the demise of a religious world view” (3). Nevertheless, he undertakes to provide “a theological reading of a series of mainly canonical Victorian novels” (4):

My underlying assumption in this book is that if religion was as central to the life of Victorian England as we generally assume that it was, then it should have a significant impact on the Victorian novel in general, and not just on those novels in which religious issues are the primary theme. (5)

While I heartily agree with Perkin that “canonical” Victorian novels must reflect the panoramic landscape of the Victorian religious world, it is “those novels in which religious issues are the primary theme” that interest me here.

Perkin goes on to say that he does not include explicitly religious novels for two good reasons:

[M]ost Victorian religious novels do not offer a particularly profound view of their subject matter and are often in effect fictional pamphlets that argue in favour of positions discussed with greater insight and subtlety in the theologians who formulated those positions. Secondly, there are a number of valuable studies that

survey Victorian religious fiction, or at least aspects of it such as the novel of faith and doubt, the novel and the Oxford Movement, or the historical novel of the early church. (5)

I would take issue with Perkin's confident assertion that there have been "a number of valuable studies" about Victorian religious novels (5).¹ Most of these books focus on a small aspect of Victorian religion, and, as valuable as their studies are, they are quite outdated. While Margaret M. Maison and Robert Lee Wolff provide helpful surveys on Victorian religious novels in general, their books are actually introductions to the world of Victorian religious novels, rather than scholarly studies themselves.² As I discuss later, Wolff meant his *Gains and Losses* to become a combined introduction to 121 novels in his important series *Victorian Fiction: Novels of Faith and Doubt* published from 1975 to 1977 by Garland Publishing.

This project pays close attention to novels that are dismissed by Perkin as being "in effect fictional pamphlets that argue in favour of positions" and suggests reading these Victorian religious novels as a genre, a missing link in the rich tradition of the Victorian novel, that not only explains various Victorian religious references that are now unhappily overlooked or misunderstood by current scholars, but also reveals how "canonical" realistic novels have come to assume their characteristic features (5). The canonical authors Perkin studies—William Makepeace Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë,

¹ The books that he lists are Margaret M. Maison's *Search Your Soul, Eustace: A Survey of the Religious Novel in the Victorian Age* (1961; its US title is *The Victorian Vision: Studies in the Religious Novel*); Robert Lee Wolff's *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977); Joseph Ellis Baker's *The Novel and the Oxford Movement* (1932); Raymond Chapman's *Faith and Revolt: Studies in the Literary Influence of the Oxford Movement* (1970); and Royal W. Rhodes's *The Lion and the Cross: Early Christianity in Victorian Novels* (1995).

² When I say Maison's book is not scholarly, I do not mean to depreciate the value of her *Victorian Vision*, which is the book that has triggered my interest in the Victorian religious novel in the first place. However, it is hard to call a book with no referential data a serious work on the Victorian novel. It is sometimes quite challenging to locate some quotes she incorporated in her book.

Charlotte Mary Yonge, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, along with Mary Augusta Ward (*Robert Elsmere*) and Walter Pater (*Marius the Epicurean*) in his conclusion—wrote their novels in the context of a diverse group of fictional texts that I am calling the Victorian religious novel (VRN). While the canonical novels Perkin cites are not as overtly propagandistic as the religious novels he excludes from his study are, I argue that these canonical novels, however indirectly or delicately, refer to or rely upon the VRN tradition in delivering their respective religious positions. The influence of these less canonical novels can hardly be overlooked.

Perkin reads only a number of well-known Victorian realistic “canonical” novels to see the pervasiveness of Victorian religion. On the other hand, Wolff includes and reads mostly obscure and strongly propagandistic religious novels in his Victorian Fiction: Novels of Faith and Doubt series to reach the same conclusion. My project reads both “canonical” novels and obscure VRNs in the Novels of Faith and Doubt series to study the reason for the VRN’s popularity, its generic characteristics and popular tropes, and its relation both to other genres and to the novel generally. Perhaps I need to clarify my definition of “canonical” here since mentioning “canonical” novels and VRNs separately might give the false impression that I take these two as two separate entities and “canons” as inscribed in stone. Canons do change, as we are well aware. We know how many of now “canonical” works were neglected in the past decades as books not worth the time it takes to read them. On the contrary, some VRNs enjoyed far wider circulation than did most novels we recognize as belonging to the Victorian “canon.”³ What I mean by “canon” is the group of realistic novels by authors like Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens, the Brontës, and George Eliot, “classical Victorian” novels that we find

³ Chapter 2 compares numbers of circulations for some religious works and “canons.”

under such a heading in bookstores and that we now often use to teach Victorian-novel courses. Since this project aims to trace influences and find reciprocal relationships, it is inevitable to designate separate names for each group of texts I discuss, but each name does not signal unchangeable entity.

The Victorian age, appropriately titled by John Sutherland as the “age of ‘Faith and Doubt,’” was an age of diverse religious faith in England, with various sects holding often-conflicting religious opinions (529). In the complicated history of Victorian religious conflict, fiction, along with sermons and religious tracts, became an important place for the representation of religious ideology and experience. Not surprisingly, Victorians found themselves literally overwhelmed by numerous religious novels, a genre that was thus transformed “from a literary outcast into a most respectable and widely fashionable form of fiction” (Maison 1). This genre is, however, almost forgotten by contemporary Victorian scholars. Although the Garland series *Victorian Fiction: Novels of Faith and Doubt* rescued 121 novels from obscurity by publishing them in the mid-1970s, scholarship on the subject is scarce and outdated.

As mentioned earlier, Maison’s *Victorian Vision* covers diverse religious sects and time, but it is mostly descriptive and not free from errors. Similarly, Wolff’s *Gains and Losses* mainly functions as a gateway introduction to familiarize the reader with topical religious issues and their embodiment in VRNs. There has been no serious study of these novels since Wolff’s introduction. VRNs are threatened with a permanent return to their longtime neglect. My project attempts to define this hitherto forgotten genre as a whole, placing it squarely in its cultural context to answer the following questions: What are the distinctive characteristics of the religious novel? Are there popular tropes or

patterns that are characteristic of the genre? What are the cultural assumptions they depend on, participate in, and produce? How did they change over time? What is their relationship to other contemporary genres, realism, the sensation novel, or the gothic novel? In their treatment of religion, what are the differences, if any, between these works of fiction and canonical novels by George Eliot and Anthony Trollope?

Since the religious background of the Victorian world is the basis for studying the genre, I undertake to provide a brief survey of Victorian religious history in the first section of this project. There are reasons for providing only a brief one. First of all, Victorian religious history is too large a topic to be thoroughly dealt with in a section of a chapter. Without the history, however, it is almost impossible to talk about novels that reflect and engage with historical conflicts, experiences, and debates. Second, because there are many historical books that study diverse aspects of the Victorian religious world in detail and general introductions such as Wolff's that provide a useful taxonomy of religious affiliations as they are presented in the VRN and Maison's work, I attempt a fuller discussion of the relation between literature and politics and of the importance of religious conversion.⁴

⁴ In fact, many historical books have already studied diverse aspects of the Victorian religious world in detail. There are Brad C. Faught's *The Oxford Movement: A Thematic History of the Tractarians and Their Times* (2003) for the Oxford Movement; Michael Wheeler's *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (2006), Frank H. Wallis's *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian Britain* (1993), and D. G. Paz's *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (1992) for the anti-Catholicism of the Victorian period. Timothy Larsen's *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (2004), Mary Wilson Carpenter's *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market* (2003), Sue Zemka's *Victorian Testaments: the Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (1997), Michael Ragussis's *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" & English National Identity* (1995), *Religion and Irreligion in Victorian Society* (1992), edited by R. W. Davis and R. J. Helmstadter, and Torben Christensen's *Origin and History of Christian Socialism, 1848-54* (1962) are available for the diverse aspects of the Victorian religious life. Dale A. Johnson's *Women in English Religion, 1700-1925* (1983), *Women, Religion, and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, edited by Sue Morgan (2002), and *Women of Faith in Victorian Culture: Reassessing the Angel in the House*, edited by Anne Hogan and Andrew Bradstock (1998) are good scholarly books about Victorian religion and women.

The first section of this chapter very briefly introduces some of various sects in the Victorian religious world to show how varied religious themes of the novels were at that time. The focus of this section is the complex relationship between the state and the church through the notion of conversion. Conversion is a very disturbingly paradoxical notion in the context of Victorian society because it involved political privileges in the Victorian world as anxieties over Jewish and Catholic conversion demonstrate. The second section studies the religious novels themselves, discussing their characteristics, social impacts, and, more importantly, their literary values. Section 3 then introduces Wolff's Victorian Fiction: Novels of Faith and Doubt series as one of the main sources of this project, discussing Wolff's main focus and how he reads and categorizes his novels. The last section is also a methodological section, addressing concerns and issues that the current project has to face along with solutions and an introduction to the following chapters.

This project's primary goal is to draw Victorian scholars' attention to this forgotten genre, not as an isolated entity, however, but as an important piece of the puzzle for a holistic understanding of Victorian culture, an important signifier of the cultural values of the Victorian society and an active agent that wielded huge influence on Victorian culture. This project aims to point out the conversation not only between noncanonical religious novels and canonical religious novels but also between religious novels and other more secular Victorian novels. I hope to contribute to Victorian scholarship by arguing that the religious novel engages a conversation with other canonical Victorian novels by adopting the marriage plot and, moreover, that the

religious novel leaves an invaluable legacy in the tradition of Victorian fiction by developing it into the postmarriage plot.

Victorian Religious Context: The History of Diversity

“The most important thing to remember about religion in Victorian England,” Josef L. Altholz succinctly points out, “is that there was an awful lot of it” (*Mind and Art of Victorian England* 58). Any attempt to map the Victorian religious landscape risks oversimplification. Not only was there bewildering array of religious positions, but even within one position—for example, the High Church—there were divisions and changes over the course of the long nineteenth century. The navigation tool for this confusingly labyrinthine topography of Victorian religious history is the peculiar politico-ecclesiastical tension of nineteenth-century Britain. I argue that in reading the Victorian religious landscape and religious novels produced in this context, it is essential to look at both personal and communal aspects of the religious experience for all Victorians. To talk about religion, especially in a country with a national church, is also to enter the equally complex arena of politics. The name of the national church, the Church of England, and the fact that the head of state, the monarch, was also the supreme head of the Church of England uncompromisingly proclaimed that the church and the state were, in fact, the same. Conversion stories in religious novels generally should be read in this context.

Wolff’s useful historical introduction to his series centers on an extended analogy to a spectrum, “a horizontal bar of rainbow colors” (8). The spectrum analogy is useful

because it both shows the political demarcation between sects or “colors” and allows for a certain amount of blurriness as the color shades into another:

All the visible colors from violet at the extreme right to red at the extreme left represent the diverse gradations of religious opinion within the Church of England itself. Outside the spectrum to the right, outside the Church of England, in the ultraviolet, are the Roman Catholics. Outside the spectrum to the left, and also outside the Church of England, in the infrared, are the Dissenters or Nonconformists, Protestants of many varying sects, who dissent from the Church of England and do not conform to its usages. (8)

The Church of England’s three subareas, High, Broad, and Low, are represented by the color bands. “[T]he violet, indigo, and blue bands” stand for High Churchmen, each color respectively representing the degree of highness (18). Violet, High Church’s highest, commonly designated as “high and dry,” was very dangerously close to the Roman Church, and some of the high and dry members proved the precarious proximity by actually converting to the Roman Church. “[T]he green band in the middle of the spectrum” signals the Broad Church members, and the lowest in the High Church and the yellow band Low Church shared some of their doctrines with the Broad Church (22). “The red, orange, and yellow bands” denote the Low Church and the red band Low Church’s doctrines are closely related to its Dissenter brothers such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Quakers, Methodists, and Unitarians (17).⁵

⁵ As Wolff himself notes, this analogy leaves out Dissenters, Catholics, and Skeptics. The particular case of Catholics is mentioned later in this section along with the Jewish circumstance. Dissenters will be introduced in following chapters when called for. A land of no faith is like a bewitched forest in a fantasy novel—people lose their faith there, but there is no direct answer to the question of how and why they lost it.

The High Church, the second largest party within the Anglican Church, was traditionally close to the Roman Catholic Church in its liturgies and doctrines. It emphasized the authority of the church, church decoration, and the importance of good works for salvation. It also embraced the practices of clerical celibacy, auricular confession, and monastic orders. In the Victorian period, the High Church experienced a revival, in the form of the famous Oxford Movement, a reaction to the Evangelical revival of the seventeenth century and to what was regarded as the government's interference with church matters. For young Oxford dons of the early 1830s who were deeply concerned with "the place of the Church in modern British Society," recent changes such as the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the Ecclesiastical Commission of 1832, the Whig Government's investigation of suspected church abuses, and the Irish Church Temporalities Bill of 1833 that broke up ten redundant bishoprics and limited the church's power were unambiguous attacks on ecclesiastical authority (Faught 28). John Keble's famous sermon "National Apostasy"—delivered at St. Mary's, the university church in Oxford, in 1833—represented views of many outraged Oxford dons, and soon after the sermon they began to publish pamphlets, the *Tracts for the Times*, to voice their positions, earning the name of "Tractarians." From 1833 to 1841, ninety tracts were published until tract publication was prohibited after John Henry Newman's controversial *Tract 90: Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles*, which boldly pointed out the similarities between Roman Catholicism and the Anglican Church to the horror of Victorian England. After Newman relinquished the leadership of the Oxford Movement with his conversion to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, the movement was led by Edward Bouverie Pusey, adding another name for the followers,

“Puseyites.” Pusey’s Anglo-Catholicism inherited many positions from the Tractarians, such as, “reverence for the early church, clerical vestments, high altars, solemn masses, and religious statuary” (Faught 27). They argued that the Anglican bishops were the true successors of the apostles (The Apostolic Succession) and emphasized the restoration of old church buildings, as, for example, in Francis Edward Paget’s *St. Antholin's; or, Old Churches and New: A Tale for the Times* (1841). Proper church decoration, church music, and rituals were also advocated, giving the followers yet another name, “ritualists.”

Another important thing for the Tractarians, as many of Charlotte Mary Yonge’s heroines later realize, was to completely submit to and obey church authority. Additionally, the power of baptism and confirmation for salvation (Baptismal Regeneration) was naturally highlighted for High Church members who were deeply invested in the church’s ultimate authority.

The High Church’s bitter enemy, the Low Church, was the largest party within the Anglican Church, and Low Church supporters were better known as Evangelicals. Close to Dissenters in the spectrum, most Low Church members likewise believed in Calvinistic predestination and election, and they generally emphasized the importance of conversion over baptismal regeneration and of justification of faith as opposed to justification by good works. They were naturally against Romanism and, not surprisingly, often attacked the High Anglicans as disguised Papists. The Bible, and not the Church, was the most important authority for Evangelicals, and the emphasis on the Bible went along with an insistence on the importance of private judgment, which means that “one

must search scripture” himself to learn how to live as a true Christian (Wolff 206).⁶ They argued for simplicity in church buildings, clerical garments, and church services. With their emphasis on social works, this party was mostly responsible for Christian social reform in Victorian England, and the majority of Sunday schools, philanthropic clubs, and missionary societies were founded and managed by Evangelicals. Thanks to them, England at the end of the seventeenth century and in the Victorian period assumed widely different features, as the next chapter will demonstrate in detail.

Broad Church supporters were called “latitudinarians” because of their ability to “broadly” accept even seemingly opposing views. They earned the name only in the middle of the nineteenth century when William John Conybeare used the term in “Church Parties,” an article he published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1853, but the liberal theology of Broad Church members dated back to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Frederick Denison Maurice and Thomas Arnold also belonged to this party, which emphasized common aspects of the Anglican Church, rather than the differences between each party. Broad Church members tended to be politically liberal and religiously tolerant, but the Low Church party was the smallest within the Anglican Church. From the middle of the nineteenth century, they took over the social worker’s role from the Evangelicals and enthusiastically worked for the poor.

As blurry as the boundaries of the various sects or positions were, the notion of conversion, the crossing over these boundaries, was viewed as a definite move from one territory to another in the peculiar politico-ecclesiastical context of nineteenth-century Britain. In a country where the head of a political community also assumed the leadership

⁶ And the Catholics, the most vehement opponents to the practice of exercising private judgment, believed that it “led to every man’s interpreting the Bible in his own way, and so to a multiplication of warring Christian sects, each one of which deplored the existence of all the others” (Wolff 206).

of the religious community, conversion inevitably utilized the rhetoric of the nation. In his landmark work that famously defines the nation as “an imagined political community,” (6) Benedict Anderson suggests that “the dawn of the age of nationalism” was also “the dusk of religious modes of thought” (11). Religious modes of thinking were, according to Anderson, gradually replaced by nationalistic discourses somewhere in the mid-eighteenth century. In nineteenth-century Britain’s particular case, nationalist discourse was hastened via heated religious discussions. Most Victorians identified their politics with religions, as their discussion of the conversion of Catholics and Jews clearly revealed. At the beginning of the century until the emancipation of Catholics in 1829 and the Jews in 1858, Catholics and Jews could not enjoy political privileges as British citizens unless they converted to the Anglican Church. Even after the emancipations, or rather because of them, public anxiety about converted Catholics and Jews prevailed in public discussion. Anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic religious novels argued against guaranteeing political privileges to the converted Catholics and Jews, warning the reader that accepting the converted Catholics and Jews as British citizens would induce Jesuits to fake conversion and thus obtain the means to overthrow the British government and the falsely converted, unchangeable Jews to irretrievably compromise “Britishness.”

Of course, there were some religious issues that were not directly connected with the discourse of national identity, but hot issues of the day such as the Oxford Movement, Newman’s conversion, the debate regarding different religious practices of various sects, and the 1850-51 panic concerning “Papal Aggression” (as the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England by Pope Pius IX was popularly called after the *Times*

dubbed it so in 1850) were saturated with nationalistic discourse.⁷ In the heated controversy around the conversion cases of some Oxford dons, territorial analogies were often used to describe them. For example, *Oxford or Rome? A Letter to the Rev. J. H. Newman, on No. 90 of the "Tracts for the Times"* (1841) used the analogy in describing Newman's tract, even before Newman's actual conversion.⁸ Later, W. G. Lewis's *The Religion of Rome Examined; Being a Course of Lectures Delivered to the Congregation Assembling at Salem Chapel, Clarence Parade, Cheltenham* (1851) used the territorial analogy again, identifying Catholicism as the religion of Rome. The term "Church of Rome" very frequently appeared in articles and lectures in Victorian society; it was literally opposed to the Church of England and, as such, Rome seemed to become a territory with the pope as its king in the British imagination.

The Catholic Emancipation Act and the discussion around it also clearly showed that what Anderson would call the imagined political community was almost identical with the religious community. The Act, which allowed Catholics to enter Parliament, gravely aggravated the public's suspicion that Catholics would eventually upset the Protestant Church and government. Susan M. Griffin points out that underneath the public anxiety surrounding the Oxford Movement—and, in later years, ritualists—lay "the greater fear . . . that those within the English Church were in fact secret Roman Catholics bent on handing over sacerdotal and political power, as well as British wealth, to the Vatican" (*Anti-Catholicism* 16). Anti-Catholic religious novels depicted suspicious Catholic figures who undermined British national wealth by secretly converting

⁷ Newman converted to the Catholic Church in 1845. The term "Papal Aggression" was coined in 1850 to describe Pope Pius IX's ambitious creation of a territorial hierarchy that included old English sees and the appointment of Nicholas Wiseman as the first cardinal archbishop of Westminster.

⁸ "An English Catholic" is given as the author on the title page.

Protestant heirs and heiresses and stealing their families' wealth. In Frances Trollope's *Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits* (1847), Father Ambrose, who has served nineteen years as "the resident chaplain and confessor" at Cuthbert Castle, home of the rich de Morley family, urges Richard Randolphe de Morley, who is on his deathbed, to sign over his personal belongings to the Roman Catholic Church, reviving Richard with a "cordial draught" of a suspicious nature when his strength ebbs (3, 18). When he fails to obtain the document before Richard dies, and when the property is taken over by Richard's Protestant wife, Father Ambrose concocts a second plan with his superiors in Rome. A young and handsome priest, Father Eustace, is sent to the neighborhood of Cuthbert Castle under his real name, Edward Stormont, to convert the rich heiress of Cuthbert or to make her fall in love with him. The calculation is that once the heiress finds out that she cannot marry Edward, she will become a nun, leaving her property to the Roman Catholic Church.

That Catholicism was frequently called "Popery" and the Roman Church's teaching "Popish teaching" attested to the fact that Victorian Britons imagined Catholicism as a secularly relevant community led by the pope, who undeniably played a key role in European politics.⁹ Hence lay the reason for calling Catholics "Papists," followers of the pope. Accordingly, conversion of Catholics to the Anglican Church was bad enough, but conversion to the Catholic Church was even worse. In this particular circumstance, a spiritual journey "[f]rom Oxford to Rome" was regarded as something more than a private act of changing one's religious opinion; instead, it was similar to

⁹ Of course, there was another view that saw Catholicism as a religion. But, in both cases, Catholicism was seen as a threat to British national identity: "[A]nti-Catholic polemicists also simultaneously depict Catholicism as dangerous because it is a religion without a country; indeed, a religion inimical to nationhood" (Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism* 4).

crossing a national boundary and changing political allegiances.¹⁰ Although the pope had exercised some influence on the European political and religious scene, it was only in 1850, the year he declared the restoration of a Catholic hierarchy in England by appointing Nicholas Wiseman, that the pope dared to be visible in British politics. Even earlier, however, as I have mentioned, becoming Catholic was seen as changing one's national allegiance. Indeed, if Britain was in the long process of becoming an imagined community, Rome had long been an established community under the absolute rule of the pope. Converting to the Church of Rome became a notorious act similar to the treacherous betrayal of one's nation, an act that deserved public condemnation. After all, Guy Fawkes, whose name was always associated with suspicious and treacherous Catholics, was himself a Catholic convert from Protestantism. It was no wonder that on the first Guy Fawkes day after the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England by Pope Pius IX ("Papal Aggression"), Tractarians became one of the major targets along with Pius IX, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, and actual Catholic converts. As Robert J. Klaus puts it, "[A] portion of the English population seem[ed] to have seen a religious war or something akin to it as inevitable and immediate," and military preparation, especially an increase of naval vessels, was urged upon the government (285).¹¹

If anti-Catholic sentiment relied more on the tangible metaphor of the pope's intended territorial invasion, anti-Semitic feeling concerned itself more with surreptitious cultural infiltration, fearing that the converted Jews in England would eventually Judaize

¹⁰ This is the title of Elizabeth Furlong Shipton Harris's novel published in 1847.

¹¹ Sir Francis Bond Head's pamphlet *The Defenseless State of Great Britain* (1850), which imagines London's fall under the French army, enjoyed wide circulation. Archibald Allison also argued for military preparation against the invasion by France and Russia. See Klaus 299-300.

England.¹² The fact that the Jews were not allowed to obtain full political and civil rights in Victorian England without converting to Christianity helped create the legend of “the secret Jew,” a furtive Jesuit-like figure, “who invades England through the passport of conversion in order to undermine English culture” (Ragussis 13). Benjamin Disraeli was constantly suspected of being a crypto-Jew even though he was baptized in the Anglican Church when he was thirteen years old. His foreign policies as a prime minister were often criticized for promoting Jewish interests at the cost of British welfare. When Disraeli argued that Hebraism was the basis of British culture, the old suspicion that secret Jews would eventually Judaize England seemed to be justified.

In a nation where political rights were bestowed upon religious others only after conversion, “conversion [became] not only . . . a spiritual but also a political activity,” as the public reaction to Lionel Nathan de Rothschild pithily demonstrated (Viswanathan xvii). Rothschild was first elected to the House of Commons in 1847, when conversion was still required for him to sit as a member of the House of Commons. What was at stake was the required Christian oath, without which it was impossible for him to sit as a member. Although he was repeatedly reelected, it was not until 1858 that he could finally become a member of Parliament. By then he did not need to take the Christian oath because in 1858 the House of Lords finally accepted the compromise proposal of Prime Minister Russell’s Jewish Disabilities Bill, initially introduced in 1847. Rothschild took the oath with covered head, asking Jehovah, instead of God, to help him to keep his oath. Before 1858, he had either resigned his seat or had been asked to leave Parliament

¹² While the panic over “Papal Aggression” was usually expressed in relation to the territorial invasion, there was also a fear of Catholicism’s psychological control: “As a religion of reason and intellect, Protestantism seemed vulnerable to the predations of invading Jesuits who were not afraid to appeal to the senses and the imagination” (Ceraldi 361).

because he refused to take the Christian oath. Catholics after 1828 and the Jews after 1858 could enjoy British citizenship without conversion, but even after these emancipating acts, deepened anxiety over their identities flourished and continued dominating popular discourse about nation. Indeed, nineteenth-century British history is full of evidence that religion and politics were too closely related to discuss them separately. The Restoration of the Jew, the religious project that initially came from a new interpretation of the Bible, inevitably came to involve international political policies. Restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain was proposed as a practical arrangement to accommodate the increased Catholic population in Britain caused by the immigration of Irish Catholics. We have seen what became of it.

Having stated that “religious conversion causes not only a problem of personal and psychological identity, but also a problem of social identity,” Massimo Leone goes on to ask, “How long do converted people have to wait, and how many demonstrations of full acceptance of their new faith do they have to offer, before the new community wherein they are desperately trying to integrate, considers them as full members and bestows upon them all the rights of their new position?” (6). If we seek an answer from the history of the Jews and the Catholics in Victorian England, the answer seems to be a resounding “never.”¹³ What is significant here is that this answer was given to both the Jews and Catholics, as if their respective religious identities were erased and there remained only their political identity as “the other” to Protestant Britain.¹⁴ The politically

¹³ Miriam Elizabeth Burstein supports this reading: “Anti-Catholic fiction . . . seeks to demonstrate the sheer impossibility of naturalizing Roman Catholicism in a British Context” (342).

¹⁴ According to Nadia Valman, Victorian Jewish novelists endeavor to draw the readers’ attention to the similarity between the Jewish heroine and those who try to convert her. The political aspect of the Victorian conversion appears to explain why these endeavors fail. See Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007). Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture 54.

uneven situations of Catholics and Jews, that Jews had to wait about thirty more years after the Catholic emancipation before they enjoyed similar political privileges, did not seem to help distinguishing them. Although the nineteenth-century Jewish question had its own history and chronology in the wake of the French Revolution and in the context of millenarian thought following political upheavals in Europe, in nationalistic discourse Jews were just “others” when “the rhetoric of conversion enter[ed] . . . English historical writing in general” (Ragussis 93). As Michael Ragussis goes on to explain, “[T]he trope of conversion becomes a crucial figure used by writers of English history to construct, regulate, maintain, and erase different racial and national identities (93). Not only were “reforms relating to Catholic and Jewish political and religious ‘disabilities’ . . . often discussed at the same time,” but also the same language was used to describe them: “Language that induces a feeling of repulsion from the corrupted body is also a commonplace of anti-Semitic propaganda, to which anti-Catholicism came only second in ‘power and longevity’” (Wheeler 31, 30-31). There was an “overlapping nature of Jewish and Catholic stereotypes” (Burstein 334) in popular Victorian novels, and often the physical appearances of members of both religions were believed to be very similar, as critics such as Miriam Elizabeth Burstein and Kirstie Blair point out¹⁵

In popular sentiment, the Jews and Catholics stood for the same otherness, the same threat to Britishness. And most importantly, they were both seen to work to undermine what was cherished as the basis of the national ideal of Protestant Britain, in one word, family:

¹⁵ Kirstie Blair observes this confused identity in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*. In discussing Daniel Deronda’s identity, Blair points out that the novel’s description of Deronda relies on this public confusion. While his external appearances indicate his Jewish identity, Deronda is also described as a Jesuit-like character. See Blair 46-7 and Burstein 333.

[M]ost Protestant denominations represented Roman Catholicism and Judaism as structurally and temperamentally identical, a claim stretching back at least to Martin Luther. . . . Victorian Protestants accused both religions of substituting man-made laws for biblical truths; of elevating priestly authority above private judgment; and of forbidding the laity access to the Bible. . . .

Protestants, and especially evangelicals, further claimed that Judaism and Roman Catholicism were ultimately fatal to the family and its virtues. (Burstein 333)

Naturally, anti-Catholic and/or anti-Semitic religious novels present family at the center of their narratives, casting a suspicious look at the celibacy of the Catholic priesthood, as we will see later. Anxiety over these religious others' (false) identities continued dominating nationalistic discourses of Victorian Britain, helping define British national identity throughout the nineteenth century. And anxiety over false conversion and what had been seen as the crisis of national identity led Victorian writers to consider what characteristics genuine and permanent conversion might have.

The concept of conversion was, in fact, a paradoxical notion that was insecurely balanced between tolerance and exclusiveness, acceptance and rejection. Each sect was willing to have more converts in theory, but since one corollary result of conversion in Victorian Britain was access to political privileges, conversion was often regarded with suspicion, especially for Jews and Catholics, as seen earlier. The panic over false conversion was naturally a popular theme of the religious novel. The genre of the conversion narrative that initially appeared to solely concern the convert's interiority and his or her religious community also came to participate in the discussion about what it

meant to be a part of political community. And because the religious community was equated with the political community in this particular circumstance, religious issues were often charged with strongly political language, helping to develop discourses on nation and national identity. What helped to make various religious issues, especially conversion, public concerns came from the specific politico-ecclesiastical context of Britain, and I argue that the issue of conversion, a religious topic that could have remained in the realm of theology, helped demarcate the national identity of Victorian Britain.

The Religious Novel Genre

In a nutshell, the VRN belongs to the genre of the religious bildungsroman. I use the term “religious” because the VRN includes various types of religion, including irreligion rather than just Christianity. Although most VRNs are concerned with the Christian religion, there are some novels that deal with others, however slightly or mockingly. In Thomas de Longueville’s *The Life of a Prig* (1885), the protagonist from a family of Anglican clergymen experiences a variety of religious identities: from High Church, to Catholicism, to Confucianism, to agnosticism, and, eventually, to a self-religion that affirms worshipping of the self as the only possible form of “pure religion” (120). Conybeare’s *Perversion: or, the Causes and Consequences of Infidelity* (1856) also features an antagonist who becomes a Mormon. Hence I call the genre the religious novel, not the Christian novel. All classes and genders participated in writing and consuming these religious novels, although most writers and, presumably, readers appear to belong to the middle class.

The origin of the VRN is very obscure, although Maison suggests that the genre existed before the Victorian age; in her account, it was “a literary outcast” until it became “a most respectable and widely fashionable form of fiction” in the nineteenth century” (1). As the next chapter will discuss in detail, religious novels share many characteristics with tract-books written mostly by Evangelicals from the eighteenth century forward, and Victorian critics sometimes questioned if the book they were introducing was a novel or a tract.¹⁶ The VRN seems to be the product of the Victorian age, under the influence of tracts and other contemporary novels in the context of Victorian religious conflicts and debates. With the political upheavals and revolutions in Europe, providing religious teachings to the poor was thought to be a safe way to prevent them from brooding over their unsatisfactory living condition or reading dangerous political writings. G. H. Spinney points out that “England in the last decade of the eighteenth century began to be flooded with revolutionary pamphlets” (296). Spinney goes on to explain that “[t]he revolution in France had been fostered by the printing press, and it was feared that Tom Paine and his followers might undermine the morals of the poorer classes in England in the same manner” (296). One of the most popular series of Evangelical tracts, the Cheap Repository Tracts, which were either sold or distributed (“over two millions . . . during the first year”) were designed to counteract the noxious effects of these political pamphlets (296). Soon, many other religious societies such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society followed the tradition of the Cheap Repository Tracts—of 114 tracts, about half were written by Hannah More—and

¹⁶ See reviews about Frederic James Gould’s *The Agnostic Island* (1891) and A. H. Edgar’s *John Bull and the Papists; or, Passages in the Life of an Anglican Rector* (1846) in chapter 2.

produced similar texts.¹⁷ The VRN appeared to adapt the trope of conversion and narrative styles of these tracts to discuss religious issues of Victorian society.

What made the VRN “a most respectable and widely fashionable form of fiction” in the nineteenth century were Victorian society’s complex religious history, its conflicts and debates, and the innovative function of the novel as a forum for these debates (Maison 1):

Fiction became the pulpit, the confessional and the battlefield for countless Victorians, and the novel was used by them more than any other form of art to portray the religious movements of their time, to be a vehicle for all manner of theological and ecclesiastical propaganda, to conduct debates and controversies, and to tell the world of their doubts and conflicts, their spiritual travels and phases of faith. (5)

The VRN’s sudden popularity in the nineteenth century did not seem to result from any narrative innovation or thematic change. Its didactic message or the way it delivers the message through exemplary characters renders it very similar to earlier tractbooks. The reason for the sudden popularity of the VRN in the nineteenth century lay in the religious debates of Victorian society and its close relationship with the reader. This propagandistic genre could magnetize readers because it followed a more reciprocal procedure than the generally accepted formula of producing and consuming novels—a rather unilateral process from author to reader.¹⁸ Readers became authors and vice versa in this lively conversation. As Newman states in his preface, he wrote *Loss and Gain*

¹⁷ See Spinney’s bibliography for more information. Spinney lists all tracts chronologically and provides the original bibliographical information.

¹⁸ Of course, I am not claiming that the religious novel is a unique “conversation” genre. Readers have responded to novels by publishing articles or writing letters to authors. What I want to emphasize is that the genre’s readers responded to it in the medium of fiction.

(1848) in response to Elizabeth Harris's *Rest in the Church* (1848). An anonymous author confessed in the preface of *Father Oswald; A Genuine Catholic Story* (1842) that Grace Kennedy's anti-Catholic *Father Clement; A Roman Catholic Story* (1823) induced the author to compose the novel and declared that the novel's "only aim [was] to present an antidote to the baneful production of 'Father Clement'" (vi); the preface begins as follows: "Having observed with much pain, several years ago, the harm done against the truth by the publication of 'Father Clement' and many similar productions, I was induced . . . to sketch the following story" (v). Some novelists chose to target several novels rather than one: Frances Trollope's *Father Eustace* (1847), for example, is a vehement attack on all pro-Catholic novels. The reader responded to a novel through the medium of fiction by writing another novel to "correct" religious opinions taught in other novel(s) and the conversation went on in this way.

As the next chapter will elaborate, I argue that the hybridity of the VRN—heavy reliance on various intimate subgenres such as memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, and letters—is an effort to overcome the limit of fictionality, an endeavor to give the reader an illusion that the stories they read are "real" stories, making them feel a personal intimacy with the characters writing so frankly about their spiritual lives. Of course, a novel being a made-up story, it is impossible to present it as a history of a real person. But at the same time, religious experiences would lose their persuasiveness if they were taken to be results of imagination only. Without the reader who finds the novel a "real" story of a person's spiritual journey, the work is a failure as religious propaganda since the reader will not even think about taking religious issues of the novel as seriously as he or she would if the problems were those of his or her neighbors. The hybridity of the

religious novel is a way to wrap the message as realistically as possible. Diaries, memoirs, manuscripts, dialogues, confessions, and letters frequently take up most of the pages of the religious novels for this reason.¹⁹ These various subgenres serve to present the interiority of characters as a marker of verisimilitude in the story. In the Victorian religious context, where lots of such accounts were available for most of the readers, the hybrid nature of the Victorian religious novel successfully rendered the genre a serious and reliable arena of various religious positions.

Since the author of VRN was mostly interested in teaching the validity of certain religious positions, there appears to be a heavy dependence upon tropes of confession and conversion: often the narrative centers on the moment of conversion, relying on confessional narrative along the way. Conversion in these Victorian religious novels means a publicly professed or privately acknowledged acceptance or desertion of a religious affiliation. This comprehensive definition consequently includes a change of religious opinion within the Anglican Church, a change from any kind of belief to unbelief and, even a change from the Christian religion to other religions such as Islam and Buddhism. Conversion narrative's dominant presence in the VRN is underlined even in some novels without any conversion, for its absence is spoken in a thundering voice by a condemning author or by a tormented narrator's agonized voice. Deathbed encounters and scenes of derangement tropes were very often utilized along with the conversion and confession narrative.

Surprisingly, however, the moment of conversion is often unrepresented in the text. Conversion takes place offstage, constituting a narrative gap or silence. This

¹⁹ The hybridity of the VRN is different, I argue, from what we commonly see in the eighteenth-century novel with the rise of the novel-genre debates. I will discuss it more in the next chapter.

emptied center at the climax is quite surprising since the moment of conversion is the principal climax in the novel, which was written to make the reader think about (and eventually accept) the novel's religious position. When a religious novel reaches the moment of conversion, however, instead of using this narrative space to convince its reader of one coherent religious position, the narrative typically breaks up, pauses, briefly informs the reader of the decision of the protagonist, and then moves on. Even when we see the moment of conversion in the VRN, it is almost never a straightforward result of theological argument or religious positions preached by either characters or the narrator.

Victorian religious novels were not slow to utilize the rhetoric of the traditional conversion narrative, for it enables them to talk about their interiority. After all, Victorians' religious life was fundamentally influenced by Evangelicalism and its emphasis on a "personal religious experience" such as "a conversion experience and a life of intimacy with God" greatly affected the way Victorians understood and practiced religious life (Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt* 11). The rhetoric of the conversion narrative enabled Victorians to focus on their individual experiences rather than on their social and cultural background. The long-established tradition of self-writing through the conversion narrative and religious novels was, after all, about an individual's story of a conversion experience and personal relationship with God. What is significant in the stories of the conversion narrative is that they successfully present the interiority for the stereotypical characters, overcoming the seemingly contradictory juxtaposition. Overused and banal stereotypes are successfully reincarnated as individuals with a most interesting interiority in the genre of the Victorian religious novel.

The trope of conversion reveals how closely connected home and religion were for the Victorians. Conversion narratives repeatedly spotlight family relations and the problem of authority within the family, as chapter 4 will discuss in detail. The spiritual struggle of protagonists is drawn in their family setting, and their relationship with other family members receives due attention. Wives and daughters are often opposed to husbands and fathers in many VRNs, and the family receives the spotlight as the center of religious struggles. Hence, religious novels reveal the cultural assumptions regarding family life and the familial hierarchy, which they seemingly reinforce. At the same time, in the course of the long nineteenth century, religious novels, especially novels with female protagonists, seemed to have helped the reader to rethink about the given structure within family life. Even when they defied their father's authority, if their religious position was espoused by the author, heroines were encouragingly depicted in their power struggle.

The wildly different range of defiant actions and choices thought possible for earlier novel's heroines as well as the later ones seems to indicate the VRN's contribution to women's (spiritual) freedom. In Frances Milton Trollope's anti-Low Church novel, *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837), Helen Mowbray remains in her mother's house even after her widowed mother remarries the new Evangelical vicar, despite her conviction that her stepfather is a morally corrupt and religiously hypocritical person. It is only when she is attacked in her house by her stepfather's cousin, Stephen Corbold, that Helen literally runs away from home. Locked in the same room with Stephen, Helen learns that her stepfather not only sanctions Stephen's advances but also arranged the meeting, making sure "[t]here is not a single human being left in the house," so that Stephen can force

Helen to accept his “proposal”: “[P]romise to marry me without more trouble, or else, as the Lord liveth, I will make you thankful for the same, without my ever asking you again” (3: 226). In William Gresley’s *Charles Lever; or, The Man of the Nineteenth Century* (1841), Margaret Franklin, a girl who returns her cousin Charles Lever’s love, is forbidden to “favour him [Charles] with [her] company” by her father, Joseph Franklin (95). Joseph points out that Charles is now a professed Dissenter, and he predicts “nothing but unhappiness and misery in a true Christian woman . . . being connected in marriage with a Dissenter” (96). For Margaret, her father represents her own church’s authority, and she feels that she should follow her father’s command although doing so causes her to die heartbroken: still secretly in love with Charles, Margaret hears that Charles has lived with a woman he does not love. Disappointed, Margaret soon dies of “a rapid consumption” (222).

By the end of the century, it no longer seemed outrageous for a young female character to decide for herself in spiritual matters. Helen Norman in George Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), after the death of her father when she is sixteen, follows her own conviction in her religious trajectory from ignorance to passionate devotion to final atheism, without listening to her close Catholic friends who attempt to convert her or to her guardian who tries to dissuade her from serving the poor in London with the help of a Dissenter minister. Outside authority does not have any power over precociously intellectual Helen. In anonymously published *The New Antigone* (1887), which was written by Canon William Francis Barry, Hippolyta Valence lives with a man she loves, without accepting his plea to have a marriage ceremony. Brought up to despise religion and social customs, Hippolyta refuses to listen to her “husband” in making her choices.

Later, she is convinced of her sin and becomes a Catholic nun. Even at this time, she does not tell her beloved “husband” of her decision or even give a reason. She simply disappears from his life.

The various hybrid subgenres, combined with the popular conversion narrative of the religious tradition, serve to establish the genre as a spiritual bildungsroman.²⁰

Conversion narratives are necessarily accounts of transformation, typically from one form of religious identification to another. For the narratives of transformation that inevitably deal with unaccountable changes of mind and mysterious experiences, intimate subgenres such as memoirs, confessions, letters, and diaries are the best tools for delivering records of these strange experiences of transformation that often occur literally from childhood to adulthood, as seen in Geraldine Endor Jewsbury’s *Zoe: The History of Two Lives* (1845); Charles B. Tayler’s *Mark Wilton: The Merchant’s Clerk* (1848); and Elizabeth Missing Sewell’s *The Experience of Life: or, Aunt Sarah* (1853). *Zoe* describes the protagonist Everhard Burrows’s spiritual journey in detail from his unhappy boyhood to eventual death as a priest-scholar, paying close attention to his emotional and spiritual development. Both *Mark Wilton* and *The Experience of Life* are retrospective novels: the former is narrated by the dying eponymous hero to warn his readers to avoid temptation and departure from childhood religious teaching; the latter is narrated by younger Sarah Mortimer to record her religious development from her birth to her old age with the spiritual guidance of another Sarah, the younger Sarah’s aunt.²¹ Sometimes a spiritual bildungsroman describes a conversion story from childhood to adulthood in a figurative sense, dealing with an adult who is still childish concerning his or her religion but who

²⁰ Chapter 3 focuses on the conversion narrative of the VRN.

²¹ Mark Wilton actually dies at the end of the novel, after giving warnings to his readers. The last few pages are narrated from his friend’s viewpoint with a letter from another friend.

reaches mature adulthood in the end, as evidenced in most characters in Emma Jane Worboise Guyton's novels. Young wives and husbands are described as no better than children in their spiritual growth at the beginning of her novels, and their spiritual trajectories depict their growth.

The VRN was propagandistic but aimed to disseminate religious ideals by portraying examples through exemplary characters rather than directly teaching theological doctrines. Because of their propagandistic nature, the novels also shared major characteristics with "the ideological novel" genre, whose other name had traditionally been *the roman à thèse*. According to Susan Rubin Suleiman, "a roman à thèse is a novel written in the realistic mode (that is, based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine" (7; italics in the original). Relying on Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality and Roland Barthes's redundancy, Suleiman explains how the message of an ideological novel becomes clear to the reader in the intertexts, although the meaning of redundant examples in each text might not be clear at first glance. Likewise, the VRNs were full of redundant examples whose meanings often were not clear until they were read along with other intertexts.

The exemplary characters of the VRN were highly stereotypical and there existed "an absence of finely delineated characters, a lack of verisimilitude in the story line, an excessive reliance on plot, and a certain sensationalism in the events portrayed"—characteristics that often appeared in novels with stereotypes (Tompkins xii). These characteristics seemed to help the VRNs enjoy wide circulation, inviting the reader to

participate in religious discourse by reading and producing answering religious novels. If the religious novel's *raison d'être* was to persuade the reader of its religion and eventually earn converts, teaching by stereotypical examples was a very effective method since virtually every reader could recognize and understand them; there is after all a fine line between example and stereotype. On the other hand, since stereotype works as "a cultural shorthand," studying it affords us special access to the cultural assumptions of the Victorian age: "[Stereotypes] convey enormous amounts of cultural information in an extremely condensed form" (Tompkins xvi). Stereotypes cannot exist outside of their culture. Without the intertextual context, in other words, stereotypes lose more than half of their power over the reader. For example, Mark Rutherford, the main character in an autobiographical novel by William Hale White, *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford* (1881), becomes a stereotypical victim of the skepticism of the age who provides the reader with his life story to warn the reader not to follow in his footsteps. The preface to the second edition of the novel, supposedly written by Rutherford's friend who finds the manuscript, presents Mark's problem as the problem of the age: "Rutherford, at any rate in his earlier life, was an example of the danger and the folly of cultivating thoughts and reading books to which he was not equal, and which tend to make a man lonely" (*Autobiography of Mark Rutherford and Mark Rutherford's Deliverance* v).²² Gresley's *Charles Lever; or, The Man of the Nineteenth Century* (1841) presents Charles Lever's life also as "the life of a *Man of the Nineteenth Century*," whose life, according to Gresley, is the typical example that results from the prevalent evils of the nineteenth century, such as a lack of proper religious education and strong religious authority (8; italics in the original).

²² The preface appears in the second edition of the novel.

Surprising for an essentially propagandistic genre, most VRNs were full of doubts and spiritual struggles, and they were very frequently open to multiple interpretations, rather than overtly didactic ones. The VRN often reached equivocal conclusions: converts reconvert, endings are ambiguous; it is often hard to determine the narrator's attitude toward a particular religious decision. Even the endings of these novels, which might seem to be places to identify final religious solutions with triumph or disaster, can be ambiguous. As I discuss in more detail in chapter 4, in Eliza Lynn Linton's *Under Which Lord?* (1879), there appears the calculus of "the loss and gain" of many main characters at the end (3: 304). Hermione Fullerton, the protagonist heroine, "had lost husband, child, money, place, and the finest flavor of her womanly repute," but "she had gained the blessing of the Church which denies science, asserts impossibilities, and refuses to admit the evidence of facts" (3: 305). Although the tone of the narrator sounds a little sarcastic, the sincerity of Hermione and her child is described in detail. Even if *Under Which Lord?* attacks the abuse of the High Church, it asks the readers to judge for themselves rather than offers a clear answer and moral judgment on its characters. The novel ends with the following ledger:

Had she done well after all? She [Hermione] had given the victory to the Church; had the conditions imposed by the victor been righteous? Love, home, happiness, her husband and her child—these had been the forfeits claimed, the tribute cast into the treasury of the Lord under whom she had elected to serve. Had it been a holy sacrifice of the baser human affections to the nobler spiritual aspirations? or had it been the cruelty of superstition? the inhuman blindness of fanaticism? (3: 308).

Given how propagandistic they are, it might be surprising to meet ambiguity in endings. Yet, while an individual religious novel of doubt might not have directly produced a simple answer for the reader, it participated in the religious discourse of the Victorian period by giving examples, both positive and negative. Like the ideological novel, religious novels taught by examples of characters and aimed to persuade the readers of the validity of their respective religious positions, but their teaching did not simply focus on theological issues, which were, for most readers, beyond their immediate concern; they also gave examples of how to live a religious life, how to fight doubts, and, when needed, how to convert. Since the VRN functioned as a forum for Victorians to “tell the world of their doubts and conflicts, their spiritual travels and phases of faith” (Maison 5), it did not aim “for a single meaning and for total closure” as *the roman à thèse* does according to Suleiman (22).

Another characteristic of the VRN is the degree it utilized other intertexts and historical events, complicating this already confusingly diverse genre. A cluster of novels responding to Benjamin Disraeli’s *Lothair* (1870) are an interesting example. *Lothair* spawned a response novel *Lothaw; or the Adventures of a Young Gentleman in Search of a Religion* (1871) by Bret Harte, initially published as “by Mr. Benjamins.” Pearl Mary-Teresa Craigie’s *The School for Saints*, initially published under her pen name of John Oliver Hobbes, mentions not only *Lothair* and *Sybil* but also introduces Disraeli as one of the main characters. In this metaleptic novel, Benjamin Disraeli appears under his own name and predicts the eventual conversion of the protagonist, Robert Orange, encouraging him to think of entering Parliament. In the novel, Robert describes his meeting with Disraeli to his friend in a letter:

Disraeli's kindness passes all belief. I am to cross over to England with him tomorrow. At the moment he, too, is writing a novel, some chapters of which he has shown me. They are the most brilliant things of their kind in any language. The book is to be called *Lothair*. Roman Catholicism plays a great part in the plot, and it is delightful to hear him utter his views on the subject. They have changed a little since he wrote *Sybil* (92).

Mentioning real events in novels is, of course, not a new device, but the Disraeli cluster of novels seems to blur boundaries between the novels and between novels and reality. There are cross-references among novels: *Lothair* is parodied by *Lothaw* and mentioned in *The School for Saints*. *The School for Saints* then refers to real life in its mentioning of Disraeli and his *Lothair* and *Sybil*. Disraeli cross-references do not end here. Robert Orange, the hero of *The School for Saints*, lends his name to the title of a later novel by the same author (and under the pen name of Hobbes again), *Robert Orange* (1900), with Disraeli as a character again.

Religious novels also could use nonnovelist texts as their intertexts. Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Falsehood and Truth* (1841) ends with the father of the family recommending a tract, "The Spirit of Popery: An exposure of its origin, character, and results" (198). The father says, "It is published by that excellent body, the Religious Tract Society" (198). This tract was indeed published by the Religious Tract Society. In William Gresley's *Portrait of an English Churchman* (1838), tables that compare the number of people and clergymen in each town, statistics usually found in parliamentary

reports or newspapers, appear on its pages to make the argument of the story more persuasive.²³

The last crucial characteristic of the Victorian religious novel genre is that it had a reciprocal relationship not only with other various subgenres but also with canonical or the realist novels. Fictional conversion narrative in a realistic genre could not rely on figurative language in describing transformation. Religious novel writers reacted to this problem by providing detailed personal and spiritual background and prolonged narrative about the aftermath of conversion. Conversion became not a moment but a process (in progress) in the novel. While preconversion and postconversion details were increasingly represented in the religious novel, the moment of conversion itself was remarkably deemphasized, as pointed out earlier. Instead of providing detailed psychological narrative at the moment of conversion, the novel relied on the popular marriage plot to sanction or deny the validity of the fictionalized conversion.

The traditional marriage plot was adopted in the religious novels and used as an indicator of the novel's religious position. A happy marriage by the end of a religious novel meant that the conversions of the main characters were heartily supported by the author. Otherwise, the novel often ended with a broken engagement or a spouse or fiancé(e)'s tragic death. As early as in 1858, Charles Maurice Davies declared that he would end his novel, *Philip Paternoster: A Tractarian Love Story*, with a marriage as a way to conform to the tradition: "[A]s all novels end in a marriage, so shall we seek to wind up the present story with that marriage of the past and present, that 'fair conjunction' of faith and reason" (8). Nowhere is the marriage plot in the religious novel by the end of the century so humorously ridiculed as in satirical religious novels such as *The Life of a*

²³ See, for example, 331, 332, and 344.

Prig by Thomas de Longueville (1885) and *Lothaw*, Harte's satirical version of *Lothair*. Notwithstanding the main character's endless search around the world for the true religion, *The Life of a Prig* ends abruptly with a comfortable marriage, concluding that self-worship is the answer to his long search. Additionally, Harte makes fun of the marriage-plot religious novel in his preliminary to the novel: "The Religion Lothaw is in search of is really a wife" (Preliminary n. pag.). However, the religious novel genre does not just passively rely on the marriage plot. As the last chapter of this project will discuss, in the religious novel genre the simple marriage plot soon developed into the postmarriage plot, allowing the reader to peep into the marital life of the recently converted and think about the effect of religious transformation on the marital life as early as the 1840s.

"Novels of Faith and Doubt"

Wolff's Novels of Faith and Doubt (NOFAD) series serves as my main source for contemporary VRNs. It consists of 121 novels Wolff selected for Garland Publishing that were reprinted from 1975 to 1977. Wolff provided an introductory volume to the series, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* in 1977. As *Gains and Losses* clearly points out, the series does not exhaust the genre; Wolff discusses other religious novels that are not in the series along with his introduction to the ones in the series. Wolff categorizes the novels in his series according to their (putative) religious affiliations: "Catholic and Anti-Catholic Novels," "Tractarian and Anti-Tractarian Novels," "Evangelical and Anti-Evangelical Novels," "Broad-Church Novels," "Novels of Dissent," "Novels of Doubt," and "Other Novels," covering novels published between

1823 and 1903. After providing a brief introduction to the religious history of Victorian England, Wolff adds a more detailed and topic-oriented survey for each subcategory in chronological order, ending each category with a “Summing Up” section of one or two pages.

Wolff seems to be quite arbitrary in choosing novels for his series, which, in his own words, is “a large collection of the important religious novels” and “a collection of 121 Victorian novels of religion” (xiii, 2).²⁴ The criterion cannot be obscurity since he includes well-known (religious) novels such as Mary Augusta Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and *Helbeck of Bannisdale* (1898), Newman’s *Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* (1848), Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), George Eliot’s *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1858), and Walter Pater’s *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas* (1885) to name only a few. Furthermore, the series also includes some novels whose main themes are not strictly confined to religious issues. Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is not a novel that is known mostly for its discussion of religious issues. Neither are Margaret Oliphant’s *Miss Marjoribanks* (1866) and *The Doctor’s Family* (1863), where religion does not play a central role. Notwithstanding Wolff’s explanation that the novel includes “a most appealing Dissenting minister,” Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853) is not remembered as one of the books called a “Novel of Dissent” (329). Similarly, Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), the last novel of the series in chronological order, is also better known as a novel that criticizes Victorian hypocrisy in general than as a religious novel. Lesser-known novels such as Francis C. Burnand’s *My Time and What I’ve Done with It* (1874) and Frederick William Farrar’s *Eric, or Little by Little: A Tale of Roslyn School* (1858) might be read and

²⁴ See Wolff 507-512 for the list of novels in NOFAD.

remembered as schoolboy novels, not as one of the “Catholic and Anti-Catholic Novels” or “Evangelical and Anti-Evangelical Novels,” as Wolff categorized.

Wolff’s reading of the NOFAD quite privileges the author to the degree of reading a novel to find evidence for the author’s biographical influence, and, as such, his categorization of novels sometimes differs from mine. One reason is that he tended to put the author front and foremost when reading novels by the same author. *Gains and Losses* puts many novels by the same author together in order to find the overarching position of the author, while I take each novel separately, trying to find its main religious position. For example, he placed Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna’s *Falsehood and Truth* (1841) under “Evangelical and Anti-Evangelical Novels,” while I read it as an anti-Catholic novel. One reason is that he read biographically and categorized the novel by Tonna’s religious position. The novel, in fact, deals with an Evangelical family, but its main event records a disguised Catholic’s surreptitious conversion attempt and the Evangelical family’s relentless attack on Catholicism in general. Elizabeth Missing Sewell’s *Margaret Percival* (1847) is also biographically categorized under “Tractarian and Anti-Tractarian Novels,” while the novel deals with an abortive Catholic conversion attempt for Margaret Percival and how she resists temptations and grows up to be a sound Church of England woman with her uncle’s help. Her uncle is a clergyman, probably a Tractarian, but the novel does not directly deal with Tractarianism except for the fact that Margaret’s uncle emphasizes the importance of doing one’s daily duty and following the Church’s authority. Frederick William Robinson’s *High Church* (1861), an unmistakably anti-High Church novel, is placed under “Broad-Church Novels.” Charlotte M. Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865) is under “Novels of Doubt,” while the novel’s covert

religious position is clearly Tractarian, the same as the writer's for this time. In *The Clever Woman of the Family*, Rachel Curtis, the heroine, does not find comfort in the Church of England, doubting its doctrines and authority until she is humbled by her mistakes and finally repents. It is probable that Wolff's extended knowledge allowed him to read what I have missed in my categorization. Or, it is because of his erudite knowledge of authors and religious topics that Wolff missed what is obvious for others.

It is probably not a surprise that I have had to fight with doubts of my own while working on this project. Reading 121 novels from the Garland series, I found that many of them are not dominated by religious themes. I wondered if they were "religious" enough to be named as such, and if they were not just like other secular Victorian novels with ubiquitous religious seasoning added to them, probably stronger seasoning for some of them. After all, Victorians did not seem to wonder if any book they read was religious or not. Since many obscure religious novels are not even mentioned by current scholarship, I had to fight against doubts about my ability to judge them correctly. As Wolff's and my different categorizations of *Falsehood and Truth* indicate, it was often very hard to decide what was the most salient religious position of a given novel. With diverse characters, a novel could demonstrate often opposing religious positions, each represented by a respective character. There was persistent uncertainty regarding each novel's identity as a "religious" novel, the original religious position of the novel, and my capability as a judge.

The only way out of this quandary that I could think of was to read as many religious novels as possible beyond Wolff's lists and find a working definition of a Victorian religious novel. To my great relief, the more I read, the clearer the genre's

characteristics became.²⁵ I also began to worry less about the risk of providing a too subjective interpretation of a novel's religious position. Thus, I found a simple method for determining whether a novel is religious enough to be categorized as a VRN: read the life of the main character in its relation to the religious issues of the time. This is still a subjective decision, but with repeated heavy doses of VRNs, I could at least support my decision with other examples.

The next chapter discusses the genre's most distinctive structural characteristic, namely, its hybridity. It argues that the VRN's various subgenres should be read as the author's endeavor to make it as realistic as possible, not as a revival of the tradition of eighteenth-century novels. Victorian religious tracts are read along with the VRN to demonstrate the genre's eager embrace of other contemporary genres and to trace its obscure origin. Chapter 3 discusses two other main features of the Victorian religious novels, namely conversion and confession in detail and the VRN's reliance on the popular marriage plot. Both conversion and confession tropes are discussed in the tradition of the Catholic conversion narrative, but the emphasis of the chapter is on the conversion narrative and how its truthfulness is narrated through the device of the marriage plot. To demonstrate my argument in chapter 2 that the VRN engaged in a lively conversation with both other genres and "canonical" novels, chapter 3 provides a sustained reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), reading the novel as a religious novel with a marriage plot. What is interesting in *Villette* is the convergence of the religious plot and the marriage plot, the interesting interchangeability of these two. The last chapter elaborates on the postmarriage plot of the Victorian religious novel and its impact on the other "canonical" Victorian novels such as *Middlemarch*. It argues that the

²⁵ Chapter 3 deals with the Victorian novel genre's characteristics in detail.

postmarriage plot as found in later Victorian novels is influenced by early postmarriage plot religious novels and reads *Middlemarch* as an example of the VRN's influence on more secular Victorian novels.

Chapter 2

Hybridity of the Victorian Religious Novel Genre:

“Not a Work of Fiction, in the Ordinary Acceptation of the Term”

For current scholars, one of the most intriguing features of the VRN is probably its hybridity. The VRN features so diverse an array of subgenres that it virtually challenges our understanding of the genre of the novel itself. Some religious novels seem to erase the boundary between the novel and other traditionally established genres altogether. Of course, the novel has been regarded as a notoriously capacious genre, and the VRN is not the only genre that utilizes multiple subgenres within the scope of a single text, but I argue that there are at least two distinctive aspects for which the VRN's hybridity deserves fresh attention: it blurs the boundary between genres, and it originates from the contemporary Victorian literary context, not from the eighteenth-century tradition. This chapter examines the VRN's use of subgenres to argue that the VRN's diversity was not a nostalgic gesture but an active and conscious adaptation, performed with a definite purpose.

In his introduction to *Victorian Hybridities: Cultural Anxiety and Formal Innovation*, U. C. Knoepfelmacher looks at the Victorian cultural context, not to inherited tradition, when he explains why there were so many types of hybridities in Victorian society.²⁶ He argues that Victorian hybridity “reflected the cultural anxieties of an age of accelerating changes,” and it “was also energized by that uniquely Victorian convergence of radical and reactionary impulses that Isobel Armstrong so rightly locates in the early

²⁶ The book has three sections for each type of hybridity: “Formal Hybrids,” “Discursive Hybrids,” and “Cultural Hybrids.”

writings of Thomas Carlyle” (3). In this chapter I also suggest looking at the Victorian cultural context to understand the VRN’s diversity. Rather than a passive and diffident imitation of past style, its diversity was an active embracing of a narrative innovation, sought to address the paradoxes unique to religious narratives.

William Gresley’s novel, *Portrait of an English Churchman* (1838), is a useful example of the hybrid VRN. Most of the chapters in this novel begin with a traditional third-person narrative and switch to a form of dialogue derived from drama. For example, chapter 17, which describes an encounter between Arthur Ridley and his mentor G. Herbert, begins with three sentences of omniscient narration:

We have already said that Exeter Hall was an object of interest to Mr. Herbert; though he went simply as a spectator, not as a performer.

It is difficult, (said he to Ridley, after hearing a brilliant display of eloquence at one of these politico-religious assemblies), to decide as to the advantage or disadvantage of such oratorical exhibitions. Many persons of sound judgment, I am aware, set their face altogether against platform speaking, as productive of more harm than good; while others as strenuously encourage it.

The form of the narration switches abruptly as Ridley begins to speak:

RIDLEY.

As far as I have observed, those who are themselves good speakers advocate the use of the platform, while it is usually depreciated by those who do not shine on such occasions.

HERBERT.

When we consider how imperceptibly men are biased by their own feelings, we might have anticipated such a decision, without any great want of charity. As for myself, I am inclined to consider the use of the platform as a necessary measure of self defence. (199-200)

This chapter is typical in using neither the page format nor the quotation marks of the traditional novel. In the twenty-seven chapters that make up the novel, only five are written completely in the third person. Four chapters are completely devoted to a letter from Herbert to Ridley—two of them with a line or two explaining what the letters are about at the end, and the other two without any explanation at all. One chapter starts and ends with dialogue without any contextual explanation. Two other dialogue chapters have only a line or two from the third-person perspective added at the beginning and end of dialogues.

Granting that the novel seems strange in part because we are so accustomed to realistic novels, Gresley's novel seems to depart too far from the traditional novel to be still categorized as one. *Portrait of an English Churchman* includes conventions from drama—not only, as we see above, the orthographic markers of dramatic dialogue but also something very much like stage directions. In chapter 16, for example, Ridley asks Herbert's opinion of differences of opinion within the establishment (the title of the chapter is, tellingly, "Differences of Opinion within the Establishment"): "Well, (said Ridley,) one evening when they met as usual after their separate morning occupation, how have you employed your time since breakfast?" (180).²⁷ With its discontinuous story line and strong propaganda, each chapter appears to be closer to a pamphlet or a "tract"

²⁷ Obviously, the second parenthesis is meant to extend to after the word "occupation": "Well, (said Ridley, one evening when they met as usual after their separate morning occupation) how have you employed your time since breakfast?" The mistake is in the original.

on a given issue, which then is compiled together in the disguise of a novel, rather than of a chapter in a novel.

Although most of them are not as strange as Gresley's in format, other religious novels are also full of letter-chapters, sermon-chapters, and diaries. Again, these subgenres are common features in more "canonical" novels, and their appearance is usually thought of as a remnant from the early history of the novel, when the genre was defining its own style. However, the religious novel's heavy reliance on these subgenres and lack of attention to the plot, I argue, demand that we look for something other than the "origin" of the novel debate; religious novels are written along with and sometimes in response to numerous other religious writings of the era, and religious novels owe their unfamiliar format at least in part to these religious writings that the "age of faith and doubt" produced.

This chapter endeavors to juxtapose the vast range of nonfictional Victorian religious writings with religious novels to trace their mutual influence. Religious novels themselves are often narratively very interesting, as seen in the case of *Portrait of an English Churchman* (1838), and I would argue that the interchangeability of these various genres in the Victorian period contributed to the hybrid nature of the VRN. Readers who are familiar with St. Augustine's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's first-person narratives of confession would expect religious novels to rely heavily on the first-person perspective as well. Despite its structure as a conversion narrative, however, the VRN very frequently employs multiple subgenres, such as (auto)biography, memoir, manuscript, diary, and epistolary novel within the scope of a single novel.²⁸ This chapter emphasizes that the

²⁸ Victorians must have had a different standard for the genre of the novel. Some of the works we read as novels were not unanimously considered as such in the Victorian period. In prefaces to religious novels I

VRN's hybridity reflects that of other nonfictional exemplary genres like religious tracts and results from its free borrowing from tracts, sermons, and spiritual autobiography, to name but a few, all of which circulated at the same time, and that it is very often disturbingly impossible to distinguish these from novels we know.

It might be simply impossible for us who are now so familiar with dividing texts into genres to realize how all these writings were received and read by Victorians. Perhaps the fact that we feel uneasy about the impossibility of allocating these religious writings to generic categories just indicates our obsessive literary practice, but what I suggest in this chapter is that we look beyond each text and its problematic generic nature so that we can grasp the active cultural practice of the Victorian reading public. The VRN's hybrid format clearly indicates an active and reciprocal conversation it shares with other contemporary exemplary genres, from a religious tract of 150 pages to a novel, from a sermon delivered in public place to a fictional representation of it that is privately consumed; and from the various nonfictional exemplary genres to fiction. As Michael McKeon notes, "Genres provide a conceptual framework for the mediation (if not the 'solution') of intractable problems, a method for rendering such problems intelligible" (20). The religious novel genre embraces and utilizes hybrid format because of "its explanatory and problem-'solving' capacities" (20).

Since discussing all of the subgenres to which the VRN is related will be impossible in the scope of one chapter, I concentrate on religious tracts of the Victorian period because they, too, are generically capacious, often including short stories, poems, short biographies, letters, sermons, memoirs, and, of course, testimonies—just as the

read, authors generally refer to their work as "work," "text," "book," "story," or "volume." The same works are called "fiction" and "novel" by Robert Lee Wolff or John Sutherland.

religious novel do. After looking into the hybrid structure of religious tracts, I will then examine several religious novels, such as Gresley's *Charles Lever* (1841), J. A. Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), and William Winwood Reade's *The Outcast* (1875) to illustrate the religious-novel genre's hybridity. The question, why were diverse genres used to narrate a straightforward trajectory of conversion in expressing religious skepticism or in reiterating the writer's religious belief? will be the central issue here. In fact, religious tracts and religious novels of the Victorian period share many characteristics. Both deploy hybrid forms: novels pay more attention to plot trajectory, utilizing many of these genres in the context of a developmental lot, while tracts tend to concentrate on a particular moment of one's religious life represented in a couple of genres.

Even before I read any religious tracts, I had been very much intrigued by religious novels' reliance on various genres. I had at that point naively assumed that religious novels would straightforwardly record characters' conversion stories either from the first-person perspective or from the more "realistic" third-person viewpoint. Complicating the straightforward story of conversion by adopting various genres—does this practice not hinder readers from getting an overt message? I believe that this incorporation challenges us to adopt a more comprehensive approach to diverse genres; rather than analyzing a historical aspect from the Victorian period and then finding its supporting evidence in a genre, generally poetry and fiction, can we go beyond our single genre-oriented analysis? Can we look at various genres together, read reciprocal conversations among them, and benefit from the cultural insight that this dynamic

reading offers?²⁹ After all, as Lennard J. Davis points out, “[T]he grand categories of literary taxonomy—fact/fiction, prose/poetry, printed/unprinted, history/fabrication, fantasy/representation . . . are part of a general ideological system” those living inside of the system were not necessarily aware of (8). If Victorians read and wrote without realizing the genre division, can we, consciously, try to reach beyond the world of literary taxonomy to obtain the new insight this comprehensive approach might provide us?

The way to think about Victorian literary texts, I suggest then, is to place them back squarely within their cultural context, when religion was indispensable to human life, and to pay more attention to the propagandistic nature of literature whose religious messages were sometimes surreptitiously diffused or very often strongly articulated within texts and embedded in the lives of the characters. George Kitson Clark claims that “the revival of religion” in Victorian England “pervaded all society, challenged men and women of every level of society or of education and became fused with the objectives of most political parties and the hopes of every class” (147). Can we read Victorian religious novels with Clark’s claim in mind? Instead of being written and consumed by a few exceptionally religious people in a society where most people were indifferent to religious matters, these Victorian religious novels were written by people living under this pervasive religious influence for readers equally exposed to the same religious culture. In this chapter I consciously propose to read religious texts other than novels to detect subtle traces of religious culture prevalent in Victorian England. So, while I concentrate on the novel in this chapter, I do not want to exclude other texts, such as sermons and religious tracts, whose interaction with the religious novel was very active,

²⁹ Thomas de Longueville’s *The Life of a Prig* (1885), one of the shortest religious novels in the Garland series, seems to urge us to do so. With its tractlike structure and humorous satire on the conversion narrative, the novel clearly positions itself on the boundary of various genres.

as I will argue in detail in this chapter. Nor do I mean to leave out “characters” from “real” life when I talk about examples shown through the lives of characters in these texts. In a published testimony within a tract, for instance, while readers of the tract were supposed to accept that its author was a real person and his or her story happened as narrated, the first-person narrative presented in the tract had already gone through an undeniable self-editing process, consciously or unconsciously, to highlight moral lessons before its public presentation. In the final version of the published tract, then, the narrative about religious life consisted of carefully selected events that underscored more significant events and neglected less relevant episodes. After all, we and Victorians have a different understanding of what a “true” story is. Accordingly, when I use the term, “exemplary text,” or simply “text,” it means any literary text written with the propagandistic purpose of disseminating religious opinions through examples, written with a definite idea of its readership.

In studying the hybridity of the religious novel, I propose to pay attention to the relationship between genre and medium: whether a genre was publicly or privately, directly or indirectly, verbally or textually, or, even more intriguingly, textually and verbally (for example, parts of famous sermons directly quoted in a novel) delivered; how the change in the medium affected the reader’s perception; and, more importantly, when the change of the medium was *imagined* in the novel, how it influenced the reading. For example, in Georgiana Fullerton’s *Ellen Middleton* (1844), a part of the sermon of the Anglican clergyman, Mr. Lacy, is directly quoted:

When the heart of man is breaking, and his brain is reeling, to whom should he turn, but to Him. . . . When the soul of man is shaken, and he feels himself

forsaken, to whom should he turn, but to Him. . . . When Phantom forms of horror,
and shapeless dreams of terror, assail the soul of man, to whom should he turn,
but to Him. . . . When death, and hell, and darkness, are driving man to madness,
to whom should he turn, but to Him. (28-29)

Mr. Lacy is concerned about the spiritual welfare of a female stranger in his congregation. Convinced that she is dying and in great need of comfort, he gives the sermon to induce her to seek his help. This quoted sermon deals with one of the most popular Christian themes, the comforting power of God. If the novel was read by a listener of, say, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the period's most famous preachers and tract writers, especially his 1855 sermon, "Healing for the Wounded," the reader's interpretation of Mr. Lacy's sermon must have been very much affected by his or her experience of Spurgeon.³⁰ The eponymous heroine Ellen Middleton's positive response might have also been understood more sympathetically because the voice of a powerful preacher was still vividly remembered.³¹ Ellen sends a letter to Mr. Lacy, admitting that to her, who is "sick in body, and sick at heart," his voice "was as a voice from heaven" and "[her] heart melted within [her]" during the sermon (30).³²

Unlike novels, religious tracts were often delivered by hand by a believer to a nonbeliever, in a face-to-face encounter. Studies about religious tracts and other

³⁰ I am aware that the novel came out about a decade earlier than the sermon, but, of course, it does not matter greatly, since the reading of a novel is not a time-sensitive activity and since I am not talking about who influenced whom in this chapter.

³¹ The memory might have a negative one, too, and in that case the reading of the scene would have affected that type of reader differently. There are bewilderingly many possibilities, but at least I suggest considering these possibilities in discussing the act of reading.

³² Mr. Lacy's sermon is actually written in Ellen's own words, for he quotes Ellen's own scribbled lines that she left on the column she used to lean against. She confesses her own tormented mind in verses: "My aching heart is breaking, / My burning brain is reeling . . . / And phantom forms of horror . . . / About me seem to gather" (24). The novel's conversion from a verse (textually given) to a sermon (textually verbally given) is very intriguing and allows us to imagine how other genres were incorporated within another genre in Victorian culture.

exemplary genres, in fact, urge us to check to see if we do not have any diehard prejudice regarding the supposed dichotomy between public and private reading, between fictional and nonfictional genres, and between realistic and nonrealistic writings. The religious novel genre challenges the idea of reading as a quintessentially private act, as readers carry memories of public sermons to their supposedly private space of reading and “private” reading would involve all sorts of “public” intertextual references. Of course, it works the other way, too: the private experience of novel reading is carried into public spaces such as churches or lecture halls. The transformation of genres from tracts to novels and the inclusion of shortened versions of orally delivered sermons and testimonies that later published textual versions both in tracts and in fiction, and the multiple roles a person can take as a reader, listener, and writer of an answering text, then, demand a new understanding of this ambiguous act of reading/writing and of the amorphous space that is created by intertexts, where presenters and consumers of texts meet and exchange their roles. More significantly, the panoramic view of these diverse texts and active roles of participators will allow us to arrest the cultural aliveness of the Victorian period in a wider angle.

Religious Tracts

In *The Paris Sketch Book* (1840), William Makepeace Thackeray caricatures the genre of the religious tract. For him, tracts are “detestable mixtures of truth, lies, false sentiment, false reasoning, bad grammar, correct and genuine philanthropy and piety” (256). His accusation is worth quoting at length, not only for the valuable information it provides but also for a number of questions it provokes:

[A] male or female controversialist draws upon his imagination, and not his learning; makes a story instead of an argument, and, in the course of 150 pages (where the preacher has it all his own way) will prove or disprove you anything. And, to our shame be it said, we Protestants have set the example of this kind of proselytism—those detestable mixtures of truth, lies, false sentiment, false reasoning, bad grammar, correct and genuine philanthropy and piety—I mean our religious tracts, which any woman or man, be he ever so silly, can take upon himself to write, and sell for a penny, as if religious instruction were the easiest thing in the world. We, I say, have set the example of this kind of composition, and all the sects of the earth will, doubtless, speedily follow it. I can point you out blasphemies in famous pious tracts that are as dreadful as those above mentioned.

(256)

One piece of valuable and edifying information for current scholars concerns the genre's material elements such as methodology or logistics, its history, and price. The most interesting information regarding the materials of the religious tract is that it could contain more than one hundred pages. In fact, at least one of the ninety tracts in the *Tracts for the Times*, products of the Oxford movement, contains more than four hundred pages.³³ In *The Moonstone*, Drusilla Clack's tracts that she surreptitiously scatters around her aunt Lady Verinder's house, under the cushions, among flower pots, and on the library table, must have been these thick tracts, to which she sometimes refers as "books" (Collins 211-13, 243). No wonder twelve of them make "a large parcel" (214). When

³³ Starting with four-page leaflets in 1833 and most of them consisting of less than twenty pages, Oxford tracts tend to become longer around 1835. *Tract 81* by Edward Bouverie Pusey, entitled *Testimony of Writers in the later English Church to the Doctrine of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, with an Historical Account of the Changes in the Liturgy as to the Expression of that Doctrine* is the longest tract among the ninety tracts of the *Tracts for the Times* with more than four hundred pages in most editions.

Thackeray grumbles that Victorian Protestants are responsible for popularizing the genre (“we Protestants have set the example of this kind of proselytism”), he appears to refer to not only the *Tracts for the Times* series, more than eighty of which were already published by 1840, but also to other tracts published by various organizations such as the Religious Tract Society (the RTS), English Monthly Tract Society, Wesleyan Book Room, and Weekly Tract Society. While the works in the *Tracts for the Times* series were all written by Oxford dons and were thus based upon “learning,” not “imagination,” tracts from these societies were of a different nature: they were written by authors of both genders, and their writings relied more on the authors’ imaginative powers.³⁴

More conspicuous in Thackeray’s complaint than the physical aspect of the genre are the complaints of the fictional character of the tracts, that they are “mixtures of truth [and] lies,” “draw[n] upon [the writer’s] imagination.” Thackeray does not say that tracts are downright lies; he says that they are “mixtures of truth [and] lies.” The implication is that they are more dangerous because they do not distinguish truth from fiction. Of course, the reason that Thackeray’s complaint sounds familiar is because we have seen it repeated again and again in attacks on fiction. Underneath Thackeray’s objection lies his belief that tracts should be “true” stories witnessed by real people, thoroughly researched scholarly arguments, or sermons to persuade people to avoid sin, anything but “fictional.”

Thackeray’s assertion naturally leads us to a question: If some religious tracts are fictional and much longer than we now expect them to be, how do we distinguish them from religious novels? Robert Lee Wolff himself describes some of the novels he edited under the category of “Novels of Faith and Doubt” as tracts. He introduces Mrs. Tonna’s

³⁴ John Henry Newman and Edward Bouverie Pusey were the two most prolific Tractarians. Other well-known Tractarians included John Keble, Charles Marriott, Richard Hurrell Froude, Robert Wilberforce, Isaac Williams, and William Palmer.

Falsehood and Truth (1841) as “the fierce little tracts . . . even less fully developed as fiction than the Tractarian novels of Gresley or [Francis Edward] Paget” (249). Does he mean that *Falsehood and Truth* is composed of several tracts and the compilation of tracts makes it a novel? If, as Wolff suggests, “development” is at stake in deciding whether a text is a novel or a tract, where does the boundary lie and who decides its locales? Did Victorians even distinguish them, or did they accept and read religious novels and tracts virtually as the same thing? According to *The Literary World: Reading from the Best New Books, with Critical Reviews*, a work’s generic name does not appear to have troubled the Victorian readers and the decision to categorize a book as a tract or a novel depends on a vague criterion of how propagandistic it is. In discussing Frederic James Gould’s *The Agnostic Island* (1891) in “New Novels and New Editions,” an anonymous critic notes, “The author of *The Agnostic Island* calls his book a novel, and we suppose we must accept his classification. Otherwise we should have preferred to regard it as a tract, designed to aid the spread of the principles of the Society whose imprint it bears” (8). The novel’s title page indeed shows that it is “issued for Propagandist Press Committee,” but it is not very different from other Victorian religious novels in proclaiming its doctrine, which justifies agnosticism, although it is shorter than most three-decker novels, probably about one-third in length.³⁵ In reviewing A. H. Edgar’s *John Bull and the Papists; or, Passages in the Life of an Anglican Rector* (1846), Nicholas Patrick Wiseman, in *Dublin Review*, also seems to rely on this hazy definition of the novel when he argues that the work “can hardly be called a novel at all” because

³⁵ Considering that most tract books were similar in size, it is no wonder that the critic wanted to categorize *The Agnostic Island* as a tract. The only reason I can think of for categorizing it as a novel is that *The Agnostic Island* has a marriage-plot, ending with a happy marriage between one of the missionaries and the daughter of the island’s governor. More absorbed in their propaganda, tracts often deal with a narrower span of time and plot and do not necessarily end with marriage.

plot is weak and the story is highly didactic and historical: “The story is extremely slight. In fact, it is little more than a pleasant medium of communicating a great variety of most solid polemical and historical information upon almost every subject connected with the Catholic religion” (261). It appears that tracts and novels were not clearly distinguished in many Victorians’ minds and taken as something very similar, if not the same.

Thackeray seems to share this practice of conflation. Notwithstanding his apparent contempt for the religious-tract genre and his endeavor to demarcate genre boundaries between the novel and the religious tract, Thackeray appears to confuse these two in his criticism. The passage quoted above was a prelude to a negative and sarcastic review of George Sand’s *Spiridion* (1839), a religious novel set in an eighteenth-century monastery in Italy. It is “part philosophical treatise . . . part Gothic tale . . . and part novel of initiation,” and “the novel is entirely made up of monologues and dialogues between monks” (Naginski 141). It is noticeable that Thackeray’s condemnation of tracts appears in the context of his criticism of a religious novel.³⁶

This section studies the generic characteristics of the religious tract, its social value, and its literary legacy in order to find how different they were from religious novels. In the Victorian period, tracts seemed to evolve from leaflets with moral and religious messages to much longer stories that taught people how to live out religious teachings. As tracts become longer and more elaborate, they appeared to become more fictionlike in form and style. But there was tension between reality and fictionality in tracts. Because of their religious background, they were understood to be “true”

³⁶ It is, of course, very clear that Thackeray does not have any problem with imaginative writings in general. In “French Fashionable Novels,” another article in *The Paris Sketch Book*, he argues that novelists, whom he dubs writers of “sham histories,” are better than historians because of the moral lessons they can provide, claiming that “a cheap and delightful way of travelling” conducted “on the wings of a novel” will give more knowledge and insight regarding Parisians than even ten years of residency in Paris (104, 107).

narratives of “real” people, but as they became a popular genre and as they adopted “true” stories in fictional settings, their claim to reality did not come from internal evidence anymore—they were read as “true,” not because they could be really true, but because their stories were read along with much shorter records of the religious trajectory of “real” people, of which there were abundant records in letters, newspapers, and magazines.

Before 1833, to the Victorians who were familiar with Evangelical literature such as Hannah More’s *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, tracts meant “the little leaflets with their heavily weighted moral stories and their fervid appeals to the consciences of their readers” (Cruse, *Victorians* 21). In content, these types of tracts followed the tradition of More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts* such as *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain*, *The Cottage Cook*, and *The Sunday School*, which were products of the Evangelical party and targeted to “the uninstructed and the careless” (Cruse, *Victorians* 21). Of course, More and her *Cheap Repository Tracts* did not create the tradition of religious literature. Religious literature had existed since the Reformation, if not earlier, and various religious organizations participated in publishing tracts for the poor. For example, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (the SPCK) was the initiator in publishing religious literature, and its history went back as far as 1698.³⁷ John Wesley also wrote tracts as early as 1745, and one of Wesley’s tracts, *A Word to a Drunkard* (n.d.), helped to “set the standard for a new type of religious tract” with a “heightened emotional tone” and an

³⁷ As to the differences between the RTS and the SPCK ideas regarding the qualities of good tracts, Gordon Hewitt points out that “[t]he religion that it [SPCK] propagated was the orderly ‘Prayer-Book’ religion of the Anglican Church, of catechism and sacrament and sweet reasonableness,” while the Evangelical RTS wanted more dynamic stories for their tracts (19).

“urgency of appeal” (Hewitt 19).³⁸ But More definitely succeeded in reviving the tract genre, which was not as actively used as it could have been in disseminating religious teachings among the poor until her *Village Politics* and *Cheap Repository Tracts* enjoyed wide circulation. The SPCK saw the potential of the tract publications only after the success of More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts*. And her tracts certainly set the tone for the future tracts of both the RTS and the SPCK.³⁹ “The vogue of tracts” had truly begun with the establishment of the RTS in 1799, which was, according to its fourth annual report, to “be considered as pursuing a design similar to that promoted by the *Cheap Repository*” (Cruse, *Englishman* 68; *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 60).

By the end of 1833, John Henry Newman’s anonymous tract *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission, Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy* revolutionized the way Victorians viewed tracts. Being the first piece in the *Tracts for the Times* series, Newman’s tract was distributed by clergymen or young members of Oxford University community, not by distributing ladies or auxiliary societies, which were local societies set up for tract distribution in connection with the RTS. Moreover, the target audience of these tracts was clergymen and dons, not half-literate poor people who, according to the various tract societies that produced these tracts, were in sore need of religious instruction. The contents were also radically different from those of earlier tracts, as

³⁸ Wesley’s *A Word to a Drunkard* begins and continues as follows: “Are you a man? God made you a man; but you make yourself a beast. Wherein does a man differ from a beast? Is it not chiefly in reason, in understanding? But you throw away what reason you have. You strip yourself of your understanding. You do all you can to make yourself a mere beast: not a fool, not a madman only, but a swine, a poor filthy swine”; “On what motive do you thus poison yourself? Only for the pleasure of doing it? What, will you make yourself a beast, or rather a Devil? . . . O never call yourself a Christian! Never call yourself a man! You are sunk beneath the greater part of the beasts that perish” (*Miscellaneous Works* 143, 144). Although the publication date of the tract was not known, it was clear from Wesley’s journal that the tract was written on 28 November 1745: “*Thur.* 28. [Nov. 1745.]—I wrote *A Word to a Drunkard*” (*Works* 325; italics in the original).

³⁹ Some RTS clergymen like George Burder regretted that her tracts did not have more strong doctrines, but it is beyond doubt that More set the general tone for the future tracts.

inferred from the following titles of the Oxford tracts: *Thoughts Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy on Alterations in the Liturgy* (no. 3); *The Visible Church* (no. 11); *Christian Liberty, or, Why Should We Belong to the Church of England?* (nos. 29 and 30); *Via Media* (nos. 38 and 41); *Sermons for Saints' Days and Holidays* (nos. 52 and 54); *The Antiquity of the Existing Liturgies* (no. 63); *Testimony of Writers in the Later English Church to the Doctrine of the Apostolical Succession* (no. 74); and *Whether a Clergyman of the Church of England Be Now Bound to Have Morning and Evening Prayers Daily in His Parish Church* (no. 84). As it is clear from the titles, the Oxford tracts consisted of treatises, scholarly articles, and sermons, mostly addressed to clergymen and dons on issues in which laypeople are not usually interested.

These Oxford tracts were widely different from those published by the RTS. Although most of the tracts published by the RTS were direct hortatory speeches, sermons, and Christian anecdotes and although David Bogue, one of the founders of the RTS, worried that they were too dry to attract the worldly, for whose benefit these tracts were designed, the following titles promised much lighter reading than the Oxford tracts: “Repentance and Happy Death of Lord Rochester” (no. 6), “To a Youth, on the Importance of Purity” (no. 8), “The Penitent Female” (no. 42), “The Debtor’s Friend, (for Prisoners)” (no. 81), “Memoirs of a Female Vagrant, (written by herself) and Instructions for the Recovery of Persons Apparently Drowned” (no. 95), and “The Dairyman’s Daughter, an Authentic Narrative” (no. 118) (“Catalogue of the Publications of the Society,” *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* ix-xi). These titles all belong to the First Series of the RTS tracts, the series that worried the Committee of 1805 because of their “‘plain didactic essays’ which, as Dr. Bogue had said, might be read by the Christian with

much pleasure, but the persons for whom they were chiefly designed would fall asleep over them” (Hewitt 28).⁴⁰ The RTS soon contrived a way to sugarcoat these tracts in order to reach its targeted reading public by inventing the Hawkers’ Series tracts between 1805 and 1806. The Hawkers’ Series of the RTS included “[t]he greater part of the Tracts of the Second Series . . . printed in a cheap form” and “tracts, with cuts, printed upon broad sheets, for the purpose of affixing to the Walls of Cottages, &c.” (“Catalogue of the Publications of the Society,” *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* xv, xiii).⁴¹ The Hawkers’ Series was “deliberately designed to capture the hawkers’ market” and “to counteract the baneful influence of the profane and vicious Tracts, which are profusely circulated by the Hawkers and Venders of small publications” (Hewitt 28; *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 74-75). To do so, titles appealing to the popular taste were introduced, some illustrations were added to make them look similar to hawkers’ “vicious” tracts, and trendy tracts were abridged or cut by chapters.

What contributed to the tracts’ variety in form and quality was that, along with tracts published by religious organizations and by universities, there were some tracts published by local societies or even by individuals. The Auxiliary Societies of the RTS were supposed to circulate the mother society’s tracts only, but, in reality, they evinced independent spirit in managing their societies, and Hewitt reports that “most of these societies were not auxiliaries in the strict sense” (30). Furthermore, “innumerable independent agencies, including those of the various nonconformist denominations” published tracts and other religious publications, some of them being able to publish

⁴⁰ To show the First Series’ inadequacy for the poor, Hewitt quotes from “a letter from a lady in Yorkshire” that says, “[A] tract she liked herself required, for a cottager, ‘as much translating as if it had been written in a foreign language.’” The letter is originally from a letter in the *Christian Spectator* (18 March 1840), but I quoted from Hewitt (41).

⁴¹ Hewitt plainly states that the Hawkers’ Series and the Second Series are the same (28).

1,326,000 copies of tracts in one year (Altick 100). And individuals like John Vine Hall and George Burder, another founder of the RTS, had already written and published some tracts. A bookseller himself, John Hall spent a large part of his time distributing copies of his tract, *The Sinner's Friend*, of which more than three million copies were printed.⁴² It was also translated into thirty languages (Cruse, *Englishman* 69).

Even before 1833 and after the publication of the last tract for the *Tracts for the Times* in 1841, various types of tracts coexisted under the same generic category for contemporary readers. Some tracts like More's famous *Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* (1795), Sarah Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting their Treatment of Animals* (1786; later known as *The Story of the Robins*), and Legh Richmond's *The Dairyman's Daughter* (1814), one of the most popular tracts of the Victorian period, are more than fifty but less than one hundred pages long, while Mary Martha Sherwood's *Fairchild Family; or, the Child's Manual: Being a Collection of Stories Calculated to Shew the Importance and Effects of a Religious Education* (1818) reaches three hundred pages.⁴³ Most short tracts from the First Series of the RTS are less than fifty pages. Designed to be cheaper, works in Hawkers' Series are generally only a couple of pages while some published by midcentury tend to be longer.⁴⁴ As mentioned before, tracts from the Oxford Movement occasionally extend to up to four hundred pages.

⁴² According to Thomas Hamilton, John Hall conceived the idea of the tract in 1821.

⁴³ Some of these tracts were published without publication dates. The years given above followed information given by the British Library and COPAC of the University of Manchester. Although *Fabulous Histories: Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting their Treatment of Animals* came out in 1786, it was famous and sold well until the end of the Victorian period. Richmond wrote "The Dairyman's Daughter" in 1809 and contributed it to the *Christian Guardian*; the story was reprinted by the RTS in 1814 under the title *The Annals of the Poor*.

⁴⁴ See Jones, appendix 5.

In this diverse genre, the quality, style, and tone of the texts are widely different from case to case. On the one hand, the Oxford tracts and most of the earlier tracts of the RTS are often scholarly, persuasive, and/or interesting, clear, and simple in style and even in tone. On the other hand, tracts written by laypeople are often full of hyperbolic language, religious enthusiasm, and disorganized ideas. This is why tracts written by lay people who were driven to write by their religious enthusiasm but who unfortunately lacked proper training either in religion or in writing to consistently express their ideas were often ridiculed by Victorian contemporaries like Frances Milton Trollope and Thackeray for the lack of literary qualities. In fact, Trollope's *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (1837) makes fun of inferior tracts presumably written by inexperienced laypeople. The evil womanizer vicar of the novel cleverly persuades several of his young female admirers to compose tracts, knowing that writing tracts would demand so much of the girls' time as to almost completely prevent them from interfering with his pursuit of the bereaved, rich Mrs. Mowbray:

As soon . . . as he perceived how completely the writing of tracts occupied Fanny Mowbray during the time that was formerly bestowed upon listening to his sentimental divinity, he determined that several others of his female parishioners should dispose of their superfluous time in the same manner. (2: 262)

These women, or rather girls, do not have any formal religious training or any firm opinion regarding spiritual matters; the most educated writer for the tracts for the poor in *The Vicar of Wrexhill* is the passionate and imaginative Fanny Mowbray, who is just fifteen years old at the beginning of the story; the Misses Richards are around Fanny's age, and the two eldest are described as "with most exuberant animal spirits," "animal

spirits” implying that they lack spiritual interiority (1: 111). Other tract writers of the vicar are “the little blue-eyed milliner,” “the late postmaster’s widow,” and “the haberdasher’s wife” (2: 262). Of course, Trollope’s exaggeration does not have deep roots in reality. As said before, most tracts were written by clergymen and they often consisted of shorten versions of famous sermons and treatises.

However, as grossly exaggerated as it seemed, the accusation that some tracts were written by persons with too much religious zeal and far too less theological training or even proper education was not totally an apocryphal one. John Hall’s *Sinner’s Friend*, one of the widely circulated tracts of the time, is an example of such a tract. As a person who struggled with alcohol and went through a conversion process himself, John Hall was full of religious enthusiasm and conviction of his belief, but he was not a trained nor talented writer. Not surprisingly, his *Sinner’s Friend* is awkwardly full of exclamation marks, italics, and rhetorical questions along with Bible verses, as the following first part of the first chapter shows:

TURNED INTO HELL!!

The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget

GOD. Psalm ix. 17.

HOW AWFUL IS THIS SENTENCE!

Poor Sinner—What are *you* to do in this dreadful case? How are *you* to escape the doom of wicked persons who will be consigned to endless woe?

Repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and THOU shalt be saved. *Acts* xvi. 31.

None of the sins that you have committed shall be mentioned unto you. *Ezekiel xxxiii. 16.*

The Lord saveth in the *eleventh* hour,—and he saveth to the *uttermost*; therefore *never* DESPAIR. Yet delay not a moment. *To-morrow*,—may be your last.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT will *very soon* be here. (5-6; italics in the original)

John Hall said he wrote the tract because he himself received much encouragement and benefit from reading Carl Heinrich Von Bogatzky's *Golden Treasury*.⁴⁵ Lack of coherency or, rather, an overabundance of religious enthusiasm did not seem to affect the tract's popularity, though. He printed out one thousand copies in 1821 and gave them away himself, sometimes placing copies in other shops so that people could pick them up. By 1836, the little tract became so famous that he could report that "[t]he total number of copies of 'The Sinner's Friend' sent out of our house this year, from January 1 to present day, November 17, is 75,878, in 322 days" (Hall, *An Autobiography* 103). In the next year the tract was adopted and published by the American Tract Society.⁴⁶

Although the RTS set particular criteria for its tracts and its editors worked together to ensure their uniformity, other agencies did not possess similar regulations nor have the means to reinforce them. Individuals could write, publish, and distribute tracts as freely as they wanted, publishing them anonymously if they preferred. The huge

⁴⁵ According to Newman Hall, the son of John Hall and editor of his autobiography, John Hall first presented excerpts from the *Golden Treasury* with only two introductory chapters written by himself, but later he replaced excerpts with his own writings. See Hall, *The Author of "The Sinner's Friend": An Autobiography* 85.

⁴⁶ To understand how this tract could be as popular as to reach another continent, we need to remember that Victorian England also welcomed heavily didactic and sentimental books like Sherwood's *Fairchild Family; or, the Child's Manual* (1818).

popularity of tracts attracted “[w]riters eager for the joys of authorship” as well as many “[p]ious and eloquent ladies” who “aspired to be known as tract-writers”—most of whom had “little ability” (Cruse, *Englishman* 69).

The fact that tracts were written by various parties seemed to indicate that tracts were regarded as one of the most efficient means to reach others. Indeed, tracts were tremendously popular and wielded a great impact on Victorian society. Victorian readers were more likely to have read a popular religious tract than to have read even a best-selling novel or book of poetry. According to Patrick Scott, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* “sold about sixty thousand copies over twenty years,” and Dickens’s *Bleak House* “sold some thirty-five thousand in the year of publication” (215). By contrast, Catherine Marsh’s *Memorials of Captain Hedley Vicars, Ninety-Seven Regiment* (1856), a story about an honest Christian soldier dying in the Crimean War, “sold seventy-eight thousand within a year,” and Richmond’s *The Dairyman’s Daughter* (1814) “topped the million mark from their original publisher, and were also reprinted by other firms” (215). Richmond greatly expanded the novel after its first publication and “two editions of 20,000 copies each were printed in 1816”; it was “calculated that in the lifetime of the author the number of copies printed in the English language alone amounted to 2 million”

⁴⁷ Considering the fact that Richmond died in 1827, the number is almost bewildering.

Richard D. Altick’s statements also show how “ubiquitous” the tract literature was in Victorian society:

Religious literature . . . was everywhere in nineteenth-century England.

Tracts were flung from carriage windows; they were passed out at railway

⁴⁷ Quoted from G. F. W. Munby’s “Richmond, Legh” in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Munby also states that *The Dairyman’s Daughter* was “translated into French, Italian, German, Danish, and Swedish, and it obtained a very wide circulation in America.”

stations; they turned up in army camps and in naval vessels anchored in the roads, and in jails and lodging houses and hospitals and workhouses; they were distributed in huge quantities at Sunday and day schools, as rewards for punctuality, diligence, decorum, and deloused heads. They were a ubiquitous part of the social landscape. (103)

Tracts were virtually everywhere, but they were not regarded as unpleasant intruders for Victorians, as a quick look at the sales of some tracts indicated.⁴⁸ Of course, the number did not mean that all printed tracts were actually consumed by readers. Lots of printed tracts were wasted because they reached the hands of the illiterate or the unwilling. But the waste was thought to be an inevitable part of the RTS's perpetual "gentle rain" policy: "The proceedings of the Religious Tract Society may in some respects be compared to the still gentle rain which descends upon the earth with a long-continued, although scarcely perceptible, fall; fertilizing the soil, and causing the earth to bring forth fruits in due season" (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* v).

⁴⁸ Some famous tracts were indeed Victorian best sellers. Two million copies of More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* were sold or given away between 1795 and 1796 (Hole vii; Mountjoy 271). The last tract of the *Tracts for the Times, Remarks on Certain Passages in the Thirty-Nine Articles* by Newman sold 2,500 copies in a fortnight (Cruse, *Victorians* 38). And the RTS reported that, between May 1799 and May 1801, over 800,000 RTS tracts were issued and sold, and the number went up to four million by 1807 (*First Twenty Years* 31; Cruse, *Englishman* 69). *The Jubilee Memorial of the Religious Tract Society* that was edited by William Jones and published in 1850 stated that 500,000,000 publications were printed by the RTS, including 66,481,168 issues printed in foreign lands (Mountjoy says, "By 1797 two million tracts had been sold," while Robert Hole claims that the number was achieved by "March 1796" [Mountjoy 271; Hole vii]) (appendix 2). According to its 1877 report, the RTS "has printed important books and tracts in about ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY language and dialects; its annual circulation from the Depository in London, and from various foreign societies, is nearly SIXTY-TWO MILLIONS, and its total distribution to March, 1877, has been nearly ONE THOUSAND SEVEN HUNDRED AND TWENTY MILLIONS of copies of its publications" (*Seventy-Eighth Annual Report* ix). Armed with Evangelical zeal, members of the RTS guaranteed the wide ranged distribution of tracts. The Reverend Samuel Kilpin said that "[H]e was not satisfied unless he gave away about 10,000 publications [of the RTS] a year," and when he traveled "he often disposed of a hundred [tracts] every five miles," but he was not the most enthusiastic distributor of the tracts (Jones 173). His record was exceeded by another person: "A gentleman residing in the west of England," who was reported by the Society as "the largest private distributor of the Society's publications," purchased from the society in one year no fewer than "741,000 handbills and . . . tracts" (Jones 160).

It is ironic that tract distribution, adopted by the RTS as a way that was “*not so likely to give offence* as some other methods of doing good,” was memorably mocked in works of fiction as an unwelcome accompaniment to charitable visiting by the upper and middle classes, who took tract distribution among the poor as a sort of new hobby (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 9; italics in the original). It is not surprising that these fictional records often portrayed abortive delivery of tracts. The eponymous hero of Charles B. Tayler’s *Mark Wilton, the Merchant’s Clerk* (1848) finds his landlady and her daughter, Methodists according to him, “leaving little tracts with strange titles about [his] room, which [he] was much annoyed at, and determined never to read” (59). Drucilla Clack’s tracts in *The Moonstone* also never find their audience. Her aunt quite unceremoniously returns the tracts that she surreptitiously scatters around the house. The housemaid coldly refuses to receive one that is titled “A Word with You On Your Cap-Ribbons,” and the cabman reacts as if Drucilla were “present[ing] a pistol at his head” when she adds a tract to her fare (185, 204). One gentleman tears the tract “Hush, for Heaven’s Sake!” in front of her when it is handed to him to stop him from swearing (243). The “Distributing lady” of *Bleak House*, Mrs. Pardiggle, does not have better luck (126). Her visit to a poor family is met by the father of the family with an oath. He growls at her and almost turns her out with these words: “Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an’t read the little book wot you left. There an’t nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there wos, it wouldn’t be suitable to me. It’s a book fit for a babby, and I’m not a babby” (132). A lesser known novel, *Linked Lives* (1876) by Gertrude Douglas, tells a similar story. The protagonist of the novel, Katie Mackay, lets a tract handed to her fall to the ground with a laugh, and a mother, suspicious of the contents,

burns some tracts that were left at her home: “I canna read mysel . . . but wha kens what’s in they tracts? Maybe the bairns wad mak’ mischief o’them” (1: 292). Although it is doubtful if tracts in *Linked Lives* are as much ridiculed as those in *Bleak House* and *The Moonstone*, more often than not tracts in fiction are made fun of for their ubiquity and gratuitous distribution or for their evangelical message, as shown in the pro-Tractarian novel *The Castle-Builders; or, the Deferred Confirmation* by Charlotte M. Yonge (1854) (276).⁴⁹

In reality, however, most tracts reached the eager hands of the newly literate public, who began to prefer them to vulgar or politically dangerous reading materials. By the end of the eighteenth century, thanks to the charity schools and the Sunday schools, the size of the reading public had greatly increased. As Altick records, elementary education for the poor was thought to “wet down the smoldering embers of discontent,” and, naturally, England felt the urgency for such education more in the wake of the Jacobin panic of the 1790s (141). Ignorance was connected to crime, and education to industry. Yet the literacy of the poor meant that they were able to read seditious books, too. Religious writings were thought to prevent the poor from developing bad reading habits and to teach the poor their proper place and social duties. As Altick notes, the question was how “to draw a line between literacy for the sole purpose of learning one’s religious duties and ordained place of life, and literacy for undesired ends” (144). Tracts were considered appropriate reading material for the lower classes because they tended to be written in plain English for beginning or intermediate readers, and they taught the reader morality and social duties:

⁴⁹ When Katie Mackay refuses a tract, she is only a nominal Catholic in this pro-Catholic novel. By the end, several main characters convert to Catholicism, and Katie finally returns to true love and to Catholicism, a true religion for this novel. Also, the tract is handed to her by a “rigid Presbyterian” (1:287).

[T]he tracts, priced at a penny, were within the reach of all. They were brief, and even a sluggish reader could get through them. Written in simple English, they could be understood by anyone who was literate. . . . [B]oth rich and poor read these works, for the public had developed a great interest in moral and religious literature of all kinds. Many read virtually nothing else. With the exception of the Bible, the tracts held the foremost place. (Quinlan 126)

Maurice J. Quinlan further states that about 1830 the London streets “no longer resounded with bawdy ballads and on market nights hawkers sold, not the penny histories of famous criminals which had delighted the populace of Johnson’s day, but urgent tracts containing some pointed moral lesson or the account of a sinner’s conversion” (3). The change in the public’s reading taste mainly resulted from the religious societies’ inexhaustible endeavor to reach out and inculcate the poor with moral teachings.

Among other societies, the RTS attempted to standardize requirements for the writing of tracts. These standards had been suggested by Bogue and agreed upon in the RTS’s early years and published in 1820. According to Bogue’s “Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts,” which is the very first tract the RTS ever published and “has always stood No. 1 on the catalogue” (Jones 117) of the RTS as “the Society’s ‘Act of Parliament’” (Jones 18), tracts should be ecumenical (there should be “nothing in it of the *shibboleth* of a sect”), dealing with general truths that all Christians can agree upon (tracts should tell “*Pure Truth*”) (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 14; italics in the original).⁵⁰ Conversion narrative was mentioned as one such safe truth that tracts can deal with (“[T]here should be *some account of the way of a sinner’s*

⁵⁰ Although the *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years of the RTS* does not reveal who wrote this first tract, *Let the People Read*, the third Jubilee history of the RTS by Hewitt, plainly names him as the author (28). All quotes about the criteria are from *First Twenty Years*, and italics are in the original.

salvation in every Tract”); a tract should have “impressive exhibition of the way of a sinner’s salvation by Jesus Christ” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 15, 38; italics in the original). To attract these beginning readers’ attention, Bogue advised writers to produce amusing stories for everyone in plain English (they should be “*plain*,” “*striking*,” “*entertaining*,” “*full of ideas*,” and “adapt[able] to various situations and conditions”) (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 15-17; italics in the original). The subjects of these tracts could be anything related to the religious life of the Victorian period. Thus, “the Bible . . . the writings, the experience, the devoted lives, and the triumphant deaths, of eminent and exemplary servants of Jesus Christ” were all welcome subjects for tracts (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 37). To ensure that their published tracts were indeed of sound moral instruction and solid Christian bearing, the RTS editorial committee met weekly in London to collaborate from 1799, the foundation of the society, to 1941: “Each tract was read in proof by members of the committee, and each member made his comments in turn” (Hewitt 27). Of course, originality was often lost and “a certain literary flatness” became the norm, partly as a result of overediting, but the RTS preferred the hard work of “corporate editorship,” indisputably removing “many errors in fact and opinion,” to an easier job (Hewitt 27).

Indeed, the RTS was very systematic in its strategies to reach the poor. The RTS’s mission statement, written in the first annual report on 15 May, 1800, clearly shows its *raison d’être* as saving the public from the deleterious influence of vulgar literature:

[I]n order that the ability to read may prove an unquestionable privilege . . . we must *provide* materials, by bringing into view those which exist, and by stirring up the ingenious to produce more. . . . Human nature is prone to evil, and in the

abundance of trifling, impure and profane publications, finds too many opportunities of gratifying and confirming its depraved taste. . . . Short addresses . . . written in a plain, serious, and tender style, have powerful recommendations; a great number may be printed at little expense—they are easy of carriage, and they are soon read. (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 26; italics in the original)

Three years later, the RTS still emphasized that its founding spirit remained the same by reiterating the mission in “An Account of the Origin and Progress of the Religious Tract Society” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 35). The society stated that its aim was “to diffuse religious knowledge and moral instruction, by the gratuitous dispersion, and cheap sale of varied and appropriate Tracts. . . . And the tendency and aim of the whole of their publications are,—to confute infidelity—to correct depravity—to reform the morals—and to convert the heart” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 37-38).

That the RTS willingly changed some of its earlier policies in order to rescue the recently literate public from being tainted by “the bawdy and anti-religious books and broad-sheets which the hawkers sold at cottage doors” showed how serious the society was in fulfilling the aim (Hewitt 16). By the mid-nineteenth century, the RTS and the SPCK had developed publishing programs that somewhat relaxed their original strict rules. The SPCK began to publish works not strictly Christian, and the RTS became more flexible, too, although the RTS still clung to its original ideals. One of the major changes for the RTS in the 1830s came from its decision to publish periodicals such as the *Weekly Visitor* (1833-35), which were “religious in tone but not in subject matter” (Altholz, *Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* 54).⁵¹ Periodicals like the *Cottager* (1861-65; later

⁵¹ The *Weekly Visitor* soon lapsed into the *Monthly Visitor* (1835-51). The introduction of the periodical form was initiated by two lay full-time editors: William Freeman Lloyd from 1816 and George Stokes from

the *Cottager and Artisan*) included installments of practical knowledge more and more and endeavored to subdue their generally exhortative and urgent tones.

The RTS also began to publish fiction, overcoming its deeply rooted suspicion of the genre, shared with most Evangelicals. Catherine Long, an Evangelical writer, found it necessary to acknowledge this sentiment, in the preface to her novel *Sir Roland Ashton: A Tale of the Times* (1844), by saying that “I know there are many most excellent people who do not approve of religious sentiments being brought forward through the medium of fiction” (v). She nevertheless defends herself and her book: “But my experience has taught me decidedly the contrary, for not only have they often been instrumental in awakening and exalting spiritual feelings, but in some instances they have been the means, in God’s hands, of conveying vital truth to the soul” (vi). The RTS was initially against the publication of novels, but it soon agreed that they could produce good effects on the general public. Originally, the RTS made it clear that it did not intend to encourage imaginative genres; in the fourth annual report of 1803, it articulated that “[i]t [the RTS] does not venture so far into the field of imagination . . . and, taking no cognizance of what may be termed the peculiarities of a party, it aims solely at the diffusion of those principles which Christians in general acknowledge and inculcate” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 60). However, when it realized the usefulness of imaginative literature in religious education, the RTS did not hesitate to incorporate fiction into its writings. Having decided that delivering religious messages was most important, it flexibly published Hawkers’ Series tracts and printed texts on nonreligious but useful

1818 (Green, *Story of the Religious Tract Society* 5). While Hewitt states that the gradual introduction of nonreligious subjects began in 1820 with some children’s “books,” there were earlier examples in More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts*, that were “periodicals in all but name,” “[w]ith a story, an address, and a ballad issued every month” (Mountjoy 271). In this aspect also, the RTS copied More’s policy.

subjects as long as any texts could “diffuse religious knowledge and moral instruction” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 37).⁵²

Until 1830 the Religious Tract Society imitated titles and styles of popular literature and published tracts with titles like “The Fortune-Teller’s Conjuring Cap,” “The Stingy Farmer’s Dream,” and “Tom Toper’s Tale over His Jug of Ale” at lower prices than original bawdy literature.⁵³ In 1830 it decided to eliminate too inferior tracts, but the Hawkers’ Series’ *raison d’être* was achieved in that its works were read instead of bawdy tracts; the society reported that “[t]he tracts thus vended, *instead* of profane and licentious trash, have, in many instances, proved the means of conversion” despite the fact that they were “below the average standard as to their contents” (Jones 120-21). In fact, in imitating the popular secular literature in titles and formats, the Religious Tract Society had just followed the policy of More. As G. H. Spinney notes, one of More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts* was titled “*The Story of Sinful Sally. Told by herself. Shewing how from being Sally of the Green she was first led to become Sinful Sally, and afterwards Drunken Sal; and how at last she came to a melancholy, and almost hopeless end; being therein a warning to all young women both in town and country*” (295). Spinney points out, “Apart from the possibility of redemption conveyed by the word ‘almost,’ this has the true London Bridge ring” (295). As noted by Spinney, the reason these tracts bore eye-catching titles was to reach the poor by stealth: “To this end [of saving the public from vulgar ballads and bawdy literature] a number of ‘moral tales’ and ballads—over

⁵² Reviewing the religious press from 1770 to 1870, Louis Billington concludes that “by 1870 the massively expanded religious press was closer to its secular counterpart in tone and business methods than it had been at the beginning of the century” (132). The practice of including nonreligious materials in the religious publications was initially a way to educate the poor and induce them to read more religious teachings appearing in the same text, but as the century secularized and the public lost interest in texts with strong religious color, it helped these publications to continue their business with only nominal identity.

⁵³ These titles are from Jones 120.

fifty of them from the lively pen of More—were decked out with rakish titles and woodcuts in the guise of the genuine chapman’s pennyworth, and sent out, like sheep in wolves’ clothing, to be sold by hawkers in competition with their ‘old trash’” (295).

In 1803 the society began to publish children’s books. Soon many books were issued for children, for example, *The Dairyman’s Daughter* (1814) and later *Jessica’s First Prayers* (1867), the best sellers of the time. Even Queen Victoria was reported to have read *The Dairyman’s Daughter* and to have visited the grave of Elizabeth Wallbridge, the dairyman’s daughter of the story, on the Isle of Wight (Greenwood 21). In publishing nonreligious subjects, the RTS’s justification was to help educate the poor. The implication was that if the poor wanted to learn about secular subjects, they could not do better than to read texts that were prepared by Evangelicals because Evangelicals could infuse “scriptural truth with general literature”:

The principles which have been enforced in this chapter, showing the importance of uniting scriptural truth with general literature, apply to many other works on the Society’s list, particularly to those on general history, and the works on Quadrupeds, Birds, Reptiles, and other similar subjects. (Jones 150)

From around the 1830s, the society published a very wide range of texts, from Bible stories, biographies of well-known religious persons, exhortations, children’s stories, conversion narratives, sermons, treatises, and magazines to works of general education. As Josef L. Altholz notes, the RTS saw “the popularity of the penny dreadful” as a warning sign (*Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* 54), and they endeavored to present “an exciting, readable journal with no evident sign of religion about it—not even an acknowledgement that it was published by the RTS” as an “antidote” (*Religious Press in*

Britain, 1760-1900 54-55). The RTS was, of course, fully aware of the criticism that it had departed from the founders' intention in publishing texts that "are not exclusively religious," but it justified the course as an inevitable change in its history (Jones 147):

If it has been considered right to admit the charge which has been noticed, it is equally right that the Society should be heard in justification of the course pursued by its different committees. They have felt it their duty to advance with the times: the works that were useful in 1799 will not suit the working and other classes of the present day. In the lapse of years education has produced so great a change in our population, that many of the same individuals who were once content with tracts, are no longer satisfied with them, but are seeking for large volumes. Not to have advanced with the times would have impeded the Society, and would have been a breach of the confidence placed in the Committee by the Christian public. (Jones 131)

In fact, as Altick points out, those Evangelicals saw rather the usefulness of imaginative literature in public education and gradually realized that they could not possibly eradicate fictional aspects in their publications:

For the disapproval of fiction never extended to narratives specially written to convey some useful moral or religious lesson. The Cheap Repository Tracts and the shoal of leaflets that followed in their wake, the little stories in children's magazines and Sunday school reward books, and the tales of such unimpeachably orthodox writers as Mrs. Shewood and Miss Edgeworth all depended for their appeal upon a story element, no matter how far this was subordinated to their message. (Altick 121-22)

Messages in the story being more important for the tract writers, filling up gaps in a given narrative with the help of imagination appeared to be a trivial matter, although the RTS emphasized the earlier tracts' "true" nature:

Whatever use may have been made of fiction at a later period in the Society's books and periodicals, it was held important from the first that the materials of the Tracts should be taken from actual life; and great pains have been taken to verify their most extraordinary narrations. So the personages whose names soon became household words with Tract-readers were real: not only *The Dairyman's Daughter* and *The Young Cottager*, but *James Covey the Brave British Tar*, *William Kelly the Happy Man* . . . and *Andrew Dunn the Irishman*. (Green, *Story of the Religious Tract Society* 10)

Although the society asserted that the earlier tracts were purely factual, both editors and writers of religious texts must have freely utilized imagination. Or, how could there be so many epistolary accounts following the same story line of the radical conversion narrative?

Its annual reports were indeed full of "true" stories and "factual" narratives, the phenomenon repeated in many other religious periodicals. And one of the earlier series of tracts was even called the Narrative Series tracts, with the statement that "all in this series are well-authenticated statements of facts" (Jones 119). Yet, it is not difficult to notice fictional aspects in these authentic stories as seen, for example, in a letter from Samuel Greatheed dated 25 June 1802, where Greatheed narrates Mary Saxby's conversion story:

Mary Saxby . . . was herself a wonderful monument of divine mercy. When a girl she left her parents, joined a band of travelling beggars, and afterwards a troop of

gypsies. . . . God sanctified the affliction [the death of her child] to lead Mary to seek for better consolation than this world could afford. She became a lively Christian, and her husband persecuted her bitterly. On his death-bed he was brought to seek the Lord by her earnest admonition. . . . [As a distributing lady,] she *gave them* [leftover tracts] *away* where they were likely to do good. One that she disposed of in this way was useful to the conversion of the woman she gave it to, and (if my memory does not deceive me) of her husband also. (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 44; italics in the original)

Most likely the story is “factual” regarding Mary’s name, job, and to some extent, her way of disposing of leftover tracts that she could not sell on a given day. But as the letter explained, the story was told by Mary some time ago, and the Reverend Greatheed only repeated it “from [his] recollection of what she said” (44). It was inevitable that imagination, boosted by Evangelical enthusiasm, played a role and filled up gaps in memory in this narrative, framing it according to the most popular narrative style of the RTS.

Tracts, for their distribution all sorts of structural and generic strategies were employed, were, then, more fictional than generally assumed, blurring the boundary between fact and fiction. Furthermore, texts published under the umbrella term of “tract” were often called books even by the RTS. According to Hewitt, “[I]n the early years of the eighteenth century the term ‘tract’ was used somewhat loosely, and what would now unquestionably be called a tract was called a book or a discourse” (18). Some tracts could be strongly Evangelical in character, but often the term meant any publication issued by a tract society. In referring to these publications, the RTS itself appeared to have some

confusion. In the *Proceedings of the First Twenty Years of the Religious Tract Society*, Bogue calls a tract “a little book” (11). The society also used the word “book” or “tract-books” as early as 1820 and repeatedly in their *Seventy-Eighth Annual Report of the Religious Tract Society* published in 1877 (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 388; *Seventy-Eighth Annual Report* 277). Wolff also noted that “Tract books” were an established tradition by the time Sarah Smith, under the nom de plume Hesba Stretton, published her internationally famous *Jessica’s First Prayer* in 1867, and he classified Gresley’s novels as “in effect fictionalized tracts, short campaign documents with one or another Tractarian purpose in view and only the crudest attempts at characterization” (117).⁵⁴ Then, “tracts” or “tract books” could be diverse texts such as periodicals, novels, memoirs, sermon collections, (auto)biographies, and religious instructions, as seen in the following text examples I found in the RTS Archive.⁵⁵

Out of thirteen tracts I copied from the RTS Archive, one is an invitation that starts with a direct address to the reader: “Mission services are about to be held, and we want you to come” (*Welcome! An Invitation to the Mission Services* 3); one is a page-length argument full of rhetorical questions: “Suppose the Deist to be right, and Christianity to be a delusion; what then has the Deist gained? . . . Is he *happier* than the Christian?—*No!* Is he *more useful* in society?—*No!* Can he meet the sorrows of life with

⁵⁴ According to Wolff, “more than 1,500,000 copies” of Hesba Stretton’s novel/tract *Jessica’s First Prayer* were sold and it was “translated into all the languages of Europe, and into many Asian and African languages as well” (241). I regret to say that while Wolff placed the term “Tract Books” within quotation marks, he did not give any reference to it. That Wolff called Gresley’s novels “tracts” showed that tracts and tract-novels did not all have Evangelical orientation.

⁵⁵ This being my first archival research, I was truly overwhelmed by the undated documents and frustrated by the slow procedures for obtaining desired materials. Before I went, I inquired about tracts themselves and I was happily assured that the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the University of London had them only to discover that earlier tracts were deposited in the United Society for Christian Literature (USCL) Luke House in Surrey. The tracts I copied were probably written in the early twentieth century, but the genre variety seems to be the same. Titles are given within parentheses.

more fortitude?—No!” (*An Appeal to Reason: Christianity and Deism Contrasted* n. pag.; italics in the original); one is a biography (*The Last Days of Sir James Mackintosh*); two are sermons (“*Thirsting*” and “*Drinking*” and *Who Does Your Thinking for You?*); two are short stories (*He’s Done It!* and *I’m Ready*); one is a hortatory speech (*Waiting for His Son*); one is an essay (*The Woman’s Part*); three are letters (*A Woman’s Work Is Never Done!*, *Baby Mine!*, and *The Woman Who Was Not Afraid!*); and one is a children’s story (*How Tom Gained the Victory*).⁵⁶

Although tracts virtually included any Christian texts written under the generic category of tract, there were a couple of characteristics of the religious tract-book, a genre with a definite purpose. One was the unmistakable emphasis on the moral theme at the expense of the authorship, as clearly shown by the RTS’s editorial practice. The committee cut passages that might be controversial or shortened previous works so that the revised works could reach the poor at a lower price. The RTS justified its course by mentioning the policy of other societies:

This course has not been confined to the works published by the Religious Tract Society. Other institutions have adopted the same plan. On this point it may be desirable to refer to an important document published in April, 1844, by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, in which a variety of instances are given, explaining how general and uniform had been its plan of “revision,” “abridgment,” “variations,” “amendments,” “omissions,” “alterations,” “corrections,” and “selections,” in its publications. (Jones 624)

⁵⁶ Generic categories are given according to each tract’s tone and series name. I also consulted the USCL tracts catalogue that I copied at SOAS.

The society claimed that it relied rather on “selection than . . . [on] alteration” in “providing what they considered suitable works for the public” and gave examples of treatise-tracts that contained some doubtful arguments (Jones 625). However, sometimes the “selection” was more freely made, as seen in cases of children’s books, for which tracts or parts of a tract-book were selected and put together. According to the RTS, they decided to do so only after they realized that other publishers had done so:

Many of these Tracts [from the Hawkers’ Series], it appears, have been circulated in other channels than those for which they were chiefly designed. Booksellers, wholly unconnected with this Society, have adopted the expedient of making up the Tracts of the New Series into little books, with neat covers and coloured prints for the use of children. (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 131)

In the next paragraph it was mentioned that “[t]he Committee have printed a Selection of these Tracts on superior paper with neat cuts, as Reward-Books for Children at Sunday Schools” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 131).⁵⁷ As early as 1810 then, when the statement was made in the society’s “Eleventh Report,” the committee of the society wielded unreserved power in editing its tracts. Indeed, for the broadsheet tracts, which were illustrated one-page tracts for “the walls of cottages, factories, shops, and any other buildings,” the editors made an “extended assortment of publications” “principally selected from the Hawkers’ Tracts” (Jones 127).

“Extended assortment” practice appeared to partially arise from the chosen tract-books’ textual structure. Some famous tract-books dealt with each moral lesson by

⁵⁷ See also the “Nineteenth Report” of 1818: “The Series of small covered books for Children has been augmented by a New Tract intitled THE POACHER’S DAUGHTER, together with several selected from Tracts published in other forms by the Society” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 369).

chapter, each chapter being a sort of a short story.⁵⁸ *The Christian's Mirror; or, Words in Season* (1859) by Charlotte Maria Tucker, whose pen name was A.L.O.E., presented each chapter as devoted to a conversation in his dream between a clergyman, Philias, and various people from his congregation. Philias wants to address individual member's various problems and concerns: "Would . . . that I could follow each member of my flock to his separate home, that the reserve which divides us could be melted away, that the pastor and his charges could speak as friend to friend!" (13-14). His wish is granted in his dream vision, where he meets various members of his congregation, who are the subjects of the titles of the chapters: "The Pauper," "The Eminent Christian," "The Social Man," "The Depressed in Spirit," "The Sufferer," and others, and each meeting includes a conversation between the person and Philias and ends with a prayer or a hymn. In another work, *Fairchild Family; or, the Child's Manual* (1818) by Sherwood, each section is divided according to the religious theme and also followed by a prayer or a hymn. Some examples of section titles are "Story on the Commandments," "On Envy," "Story on Ambition, or the Wish to be Great," and "Fatal Effects of Disobedience to Parents."

Still another famous tract-book, *Ministering Children: A Tale Dedicated to Childhood* (1854) by Maria Louisa Charlesworth, does not have such telltale chapter titles, yet each chapter begins with a Bible verse and presents a situation that is related to the epigraph. While the volume as a whole is a bildungsroman of several children ending with a couple of happy marriages, each chapter is an episode that can be read separately for each lesson. For example, chapter 2's verse is Rom. 13.9: "And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy

⁵⁸ All three novels were published by either the RTS or American Tract Society. I choose these because of their wide circulation.

neighbor as thyself” (14); it tells how Jane Mansfield, one of the book’s ministering children, learns to help the poor within her means. She goes to “the penny-club” meeting with her mother; hears the speaker say, “Perhaps there are some children here who could lay by one penny a-week, to clothe some poor little boy or girl, who has no warm dress like their own”; and decides to save up her weekly allowance of a penny for the cause (16, 17). She soon hears about Mercy, a poor orphan girl, and learns how to mend stockings so that she can mend and present some to Mercy. When Jane delivers the stockings to the grandmother, she learns that Mercy has been praying for them. In the conversation between mother and daughter, Jane’s mother explains that God listens to prayers and He answers through other people, in this case through Jane, who had no idea that Mercy was praying for stockings. The chapter ends with the mother concluding that “we have been learning what lesson-books could not teach us [today]” (25).

The majority of the tract-books written by tract writers promulgate the connection between religion and home:

From the start it [RTS] had ministered to family religion; it had fought through its publications the more obvious enemies of home life—drunkenness, gambling, loose living and loose speech; it had helped to inculcate among its working-class readers the ideals of a gracious home life, centered in family prayers. (Hewitt 49)

The tracts’ popularity contributed to the inculcation of “family religion” in Victorian society.⁵⁹ The ideology naturally appears in many tracts and anecdotes from the letters

⁵⁹ Hewitt reports that “the ‘Hawkers’ Tracts’ did really get home to the people for whom the earlier series was also mainly intended” and “Hawkers’ tracts largely contributed to the new standards of morality which characterized Victorian England” (29). And Quinlan heartily admits the positive educational role of tracts in Victorian society, with an affirmation that Victorians put aside bawdy literature and delighted in reading tracts with religious and moral teachings (3). As an RTS historian, Hewitt does not hesitate to point out its contribution: “[T]he moral standards and dominant religious attitudes which we normally associate with Victoria’s reign were already fixed [by the 1840s], and the Religious Tract Society had no small part in

written by members of the RTS committee, most of whom were clergymen. The first tract of the RTS, “Address to Christians on the Distribution of Religious Tracts,” provides some of the clearest examples. This original tract points to family happiness as one of the “happiest effects” of tract distribution:

Two instances came within the knowledge of an individual who is a warm advocate for the distribution of Religious Tracts, which he had from the lips of the persons themselves. . . . The one is, that of a young gentleman, who had been in a situation peculiarly unfavourable to religion and morality, who was living in profaneness and vice, and who discovered peculiar enmity to real godliness, and could not bear, without testifying bitter indignation, the counsels and letters of pious friends. A relation of his . . . put into his hand one evening a Religious Tract. . . . He took it . . . [and] read the whole; and the happy consequence was a deep concern for the salvation of his soul. . . . The other person had been a seaman in the navy. He was a sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, and a swearer; in short, a notorious sinner. His wife brought home . . . a Religious Tract. . . . He read it, and was convinced of his sinful ways. (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 12-13)

These stories are very striking to me for two reasons. First, the stories narrated by Bogue are conversion narratives stated in the plainest and most straightforward way. Read along with the story of Mary Saxby, all three stories seem too good to be true: they could almost be summaries of three sentimental religious novels. Next, these stories embed spiritual changes of people within family life. Instead of an anonymous person from the

fixing these standards and attitudes” (Hewitt 37-38). The family ideology and home religion inculcated by tract writers were infused into religious novels as chapters 3 and 4 will show.

street, a relation and a wife are agents in delivering tracts, a theme developed in novels to show the happy results of distributing religious teachings to family. The latter case is featured in many Victorian novels, where we find lots of notoriously wicked husbands and angelic wives. Sometimes the wife's devotion helps her husband repent before it is too late. The husband dies in many other cases, but often he is happily snatched away from the grip of death to lead a pious life, a story on which *The Wife's Trials: a Tale* by Emma Jane Worboise is based.

There are also plenty of stories about a pious (usually dying) child who helps his or her parents find Jesus, as in *The Ministering Children* and in *Jessica's First Prayer*: "A child who came to the Sunday School a shockingly depraved little creature, continued to swear for several weeks after her admission. I gave her several Tracts, among which was THE SWEARER'S PRAYER" (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years*, 343). According to the RTS report, the child took the tracts home, and when her father asked what they were, she replied, "You must not swear any more, father—nor you, grandfather; for that book tells of men that were killed for swearing" (343). The father read, repented, and became a pious Christian, saved through the agency of a little child. The theme of the child savior appears both in *The Dairyman's Daughter* (1814) and *The Young Cottager* (1814), two of the most beloved tracts by Legh Richmond that the RTS presented as "true" stories. Besides the proto-Jessica, there appear prototypes of fallen women happily saved later, models for Annie Brook in Felicia Skene's *Hidden Depths* (1866), the eponymous heroine Ruth (1853) by Elizabeth Gaskell, and Katie Mackay in *Linked Lives* (1876): "A girl, who had been educated in a Sunday School in a manufacturing town, had, at an early age, become an inmate in an house of ill-fame; but

having taken with her some RELIGIOUS TRACTS, which had been given to her at the Sunday School, she read them; and finding among them an ‘Address to the unfortunate Female,’ it engaged her attention” (*Proceedings of the First Twenty Years* 125) The girl in the letter leaves her evil way of life, enters the London Female Penitentiary, and becomes a reformed person.

Tract-books mention historical facts in their stories and tend to blur the fiction/reality boundary by referring to other tracts on their pages, as seen in *Falsehood and Truth* and the above-mentioned examples.⁶⁰ Read together with “authentic” records, fictionalized stories based on those accounts must have reminded the reader of the prototypical records that were abundant around them. Some tract-books directly refer to other tracts or well-known data to promote their arguments, as shown in chapter 1. Of course, novels have always referred to or based their stories on historical, real events, and I am not arguing that religious tract-books or religious novels introduced the tradition. What I want to emphasize instead is that those tract-books would have been read as being true, like a survivor’s story or an autobiographical novel of today, and therefore as something manageably reproducible by the reader; the reproducibility of religious experience is the ultimate purpose of tracts and tract-books.

Religious Novels and Subgenres

In his caustic criticism of the religious-tract genre in *The Paris Sketch Book*, it seems clear that what bothered Thackeray so much as to make him appear to contradict

⁶⁰ Of course, novels have always claimed to be “true.” It is a matter of degree. Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Daniel Defoe all claimed that they were given the manuscripts for which they acted as editors. But rather than simply making up a plausible story and asking the reader to accept it, religious novels rely more on external evidence and devices as well as on internal proofs.

himself in a single book was the propagandistic nature of religious tracts and novels. Or, more specifically, it is his aversion to the deluge of sometimes apologetic and oftentimes aggressive religious propaganda of low quality gratuitously written by virtually all kinds of people, especially by “weak women—weak in intellect, weak mayhap in spelling and grammar, but marvelously strong in faith,” “as if religious instruction were the easiest thing in the world” (257, 256). Offering a biographical criticism of *Spiridion*, Thackeray argues that a propagandistic novel by an author who herself underwent conversion only serves to mislead people because it favorably presents her prejudiced ideas. According to him, readers should have “an indifferent person as an umpire” in these matters to form unbiased opinions (254).⁶¹ Yet, a religious tract or novel cannot have a truly “indifferent person” for a writer because a religious tract or novel cannot exist without its respective propaganda. Propaganda makes religious tracts and novels what they are. Even with religious novels that were written by skeptics, they express the writers’ doubts in an apologetic way, justifying their uncertainties.

Because of its propagandistic nature, the religious-novel genre breeds germs of paradox from the very definition of the genre. In presenting each writer’s religious position, the aim is to persuade the reader that resolutions of events in the story are actually possible for everybody. Religion and its relevant narratives require authenticity, and any confession of fictionality in a conversion narrative inevitably renders the conversion not reliable; if a conversion narrative is not reliable, it means it is not reproducible. Tracts can claim that they are based on “true” stories of “real” people, but when it comes to novels, the claim is seriously weakened because of the impossible gap

⁶¹ Writing in his typical mocking style, Thackeray expresses his wish that “the State would make a law that one individual should not be allowed to preach more than one doctrine in his life” (268).

between true history and plausible, but made-up stories. In a nutshell, for propagandistic religious narratives to obtain the desired object of disseminating religious propaganda, they should be “true” stories of “real” people. An assertion that a witness testimony or conversion narrative is made by a “real” person gives the verbal or written story an aura of genuineness and an undeniable claim to be taken seriously, even if the story itself might have some mystical elements that are beyond rational explanation. Religious experiences are thought to be mystical and inexplicable themselves, and the only criterion that can separate frenzied hallucination from genuine religious experience is the latter’s claim to reality.

Victorian religious authors should have sensed the paradox when they began to rely on fiction to deliver their messages. In this section I will argue that the strong tendency to utilize hybrid genres within the religious novel genre was a way to cope with this dilemma. Religious literature is all about genuineness—true conversion, true story, true witness, and so on. If anything in religious literature is found imagined, not “real,” its value fundamentally decreases, for its trustworthiness is seriously undermined. Victorian religious-novel writers had to deal with this dilemma and protested that their fiction was still true, even though it was fiction. For example, Skene argues that her novel is not a “romance” but “truth” in her preface to her novel, *Hidden Depth* (1866):

This book is not a work of fiction, in the ordinary acceptation of the term. If it were, it would be worse than useless; for the hidden depths, of which it [*Hidden Depths*] reveals a glimpse, are no fit subjects for a romance, nor ought they to be opened up to the light of day for purposes of mere amusement. But truth must always have a certain power, in whatever shape it may appear; and though all did

not occur precisely as here narrated, it is nevertheless actual truth which speaks in these records. (n. pag.)

She argues that her fiction is not a “romance” written for “mere amusement,” and seems to argue that seriousness renders her story “actual truth,” although, as she confesses, “all did not occur precisely as here narrated.” Purpose turns fiction into reality for Skene. Her short preface reveals her deepest hidden anxiety over how her novel will be received by her readers. If the story were fictional, she worries, readers would not take her religious story seriously.

Other religious novel writers shared the same concern in writing novels, and I argue that the hybridity of the Victorian religious novel genre was a way to cope with this anxiety. In order to render a fictional story “true,” various subgenres such as diaries, letters, memoirs, (auto)biographies, and treatises are introduced within the scope of a novel, generally along with prefaces that claim authenticity. Sometimes, following the tradition of the eighteenth-century novel, a preface explains how some parts or the whole of the original manuscript reached the author/editor. While adapting various genres within the scope of one novel had been a common practice since the eighteenth century, the urgency to deliver propagandistic message as “real” made the practice even more widely used by religious writers. Actually, many nonreligious writers adopted the same practice to emphasize their themes. Discussing feminist new woman fiction, Anne Heilmann notes that the writers relied on various genres:

Feminist New Woman fiction shares specific structural features; though the dominant form is the realist novel, writers adapted and experimented with a variety of genres: sensation fiction, utopian writing, short stories, plays, allegories

and poetry. The shorter narrative forms occasionally appear within the framework of a novel, and plots are frequently interrupted by letters, essays or lengthy discussions. (xv)

Using various subgenres was a way to effectively deliver their purposes to the reader, both for the feminist new woman writers and religious-novel writers.⁶² Discussing the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century ballad, Davis notes that “the perceptual or narrative distance is decreased . . . by such devices as claiming that the work was ‘writ by his own hand’” (58). By including several subgenres that claimed to be written by the self, novels of purpose could decrease the readerly distance, giving the illusion to the reader that they were closer to the text and that they were to judge events or situations presented in novels after carefully examining “documents” in front of them. Davis notes that “[p]amphlets, newspapers, and ballads initiated a kind of reader involvement that reached culmination in the late seventeenth century,” and “the later novel of the eighteenth century would participate in this intimate relationship with the reader” (66-67, 67).

I believe that “the new role” these ballad readers assumed was equally enjoyed by readers of the Victorian religious novel (66). Claiming that their novels were not fictional works but “real” manuscripts written by the suffering protagonists, religious-novel writers could shorten the distance between their works and the reader, rendering novels trustworthy records of “real” people. Under the illusion that the given texts are real, readers are invited to play a bigger role in text interpretation since they need to face texts

⁶² Heilmann argues that this “structural hybridity has been read as a sign of the genre’s proto-modernism” (xv). While I do not like her anachronism in mentioning modernism, I think her argument, along with Knoepfelmacher’s, makes it possible for scholars to look for something other than the eighteenth-century practice of hybridity in reading the Victorian novel’s hybridity. However, rather than modernism, I think we need to look at the various contemporary Victorian genres.

without the intruding guidance of the narrator. The distance between texts and the reader decreases, and the readerly power increases, however deceptively, because readers get to read and interpret texts without the authoritative voice of the narrator. Regarding the novel genre's lack of any confirmed conventions, Ian Watt contemplates that "[w]hat is often felt as the formlessness of the novel, as compared, say, with tragedy or the ode, probably follows from this: the poverty of the novel's formal conventions would seem to be the price it must pay for its realism" (13). For him, "an imitation of another literary work" and conveying "the impression of fidelity to human experience" are mutually exclusive (13). Watt explains further:

[I]t is surely damaging for a novel to be in any sense an imitation of another literary work and the reason for this seems to be that since the novelist's primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience, attention to any pre-established formal conventions can only endanger his success. (13).

I would argue that religious novels, in contrast, show a strong predilection to include any short genres that can be fit into a novel in order to have verisimilitude and help promote their respective religious positions. What Watt does not grasp is that utilizing other subgenres does not actually minimize authorial voice or authorial power. Utilizing subgenres gives an illusion to the reader that the story is less edited and thus closer to what actually happens—the truth. The author moves with subtlety, giving readers an illusion that they are examining original documents without the author's or narrator's intervention, while he or she actually has written and arranged these "manuscripts."

For the twenty-first-century reader, using these various subgenres one by one might appear to interrupt the whole integrity of the narrative, making the story more

artificially manipulated. On the contrary, I argue that the adaption of these various longtime established genres within the scope of a novel successfully rendered it realistic to contemporary Victorian readers. Victorians were exposed to different versions of the same story over and over. Catholic-related conversion, one of the prevalent themes of the VRN, appeared again and again in various newspapers during the century and while most of them just gave a brief summary of the “facts” of conversion, others quoted conversations or letters.⁶³ For example, recording a baronet’s conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, “Conversion of a Simpleton from Infidelity to Popery,” the *Times* quotes a conversation between the baronet and his confessor, claiming that “[t]he following conversation is said actually to have occurred between the reformed prodigal and his confessor” (6). “Conversion of the Hon. and Rev. G. Spencer” from the *Times* also quotes a letter and another newspaper to prove the genuineness of an Anglican clergyman’s conversion to the Roman Catholic Church: “[I]n consequence of ‘many persons affecting to discredit the truth of this clergyman’s conversion to the Roman Catholic religion, a gentleman of this country wrote to the Rev. Mr. Caestryck, Leicester; and a letter, containing the particulars, received in answer, has been kindly handed to us’” (6).⁶⁴ “Conversion of Catholics” in the *Times* quotes a letter to give a more truthful account of a conversion: “The following is an extract of a letter from a most respectable correspondent, in reference to the foregoing circumstance” (3). When the same strategies of quoting letters and conversations appeared in novels with a claim that these were from reliable sources, the reader would be able to take such hybrid novels as “realistic” novels.

⁶³ See, for example, “Conversion of a Roman Catholic Clergyman” in the *North Wales Chronicle*, “The Catholic Church” in *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, and “Conversion of Catholics” in the *Times*.

⁶⁴ The article says the original quote is from the *Wexford Evening Post*.

Margaret Oliphant's *The Perpetual Curate* (1864), a novel that features an Anglican clergyman's conversion to Roman Catholicism, should be read in this rich intertextual context of Victorian religious texts.⁶⁵ Additionally, a story of an angelic, innocent child who becomes a Christian and helps to convert otherwise irrevocably hardhearted men around her was a favorite theme of children's books, and similar stories appeared in newspaper articles, in a couple of letters attached to annual reports of the RTS, and in tracts; this type of story was finally "fictionalized" in *Jessica's First Prayer* and *The Ministering Children*. In other words, the religious-novel genre could fully utilize various subgenres due to the rich intertextual context of Victorian religious life.

Gould's *The Agnostic Island* (1891) is probably one of the best examples of the use of intertextual context in religious novels. In the first chapter of the novel, the reader is invited to imagine Exeter Hall "crammed to its utmost capacity" with ladies, military men, and various religious parties for the meeting of "the Oceanic Missionary Society," and the speeches of the chairman, the bishop, and a priest are all reported in a journalistic style, with the audience's response within parentheses (5, 6):

But the tendency of Agnostic principles was, alas, too well known—(hear, hear)—and they would be prepared for any terrible revelation of the depths to which humanity without God might sink. They would not be surprised to meet with misery, poverty, sordid ignorance, and even barbarism and cannibalism. (Shudders.) But he [the bishop], for his part, would not recoil from even that last horror—(loud cheers)—in the prosecution of the great missionary cause. "If," declared the Bishop in conclusion—"if, through your support, your co-operation, and your prayers, my unworthy and feeble efforts—"("No, no")—and those of my

⁶⁵ Chapter 4 will discuss *The Perpetual Curate* in detail.

dear fellow-workers, shall contribute to the salvation of this unhappy people, how thankful shall we be. (8)

The description reads like a report of a journalist, a familiar genre for Victorians. At the same time, the parentheses allow the reader to vicariously experience the speeches, giving an illusion that the reader can really know what has happened in Exeter Hall.

The next chapter in *The Agnostic Island* adapts a dramalike conversation style, which appears in both *Portrait of an English Churchman* (1838) and *The Christian's Mirror; or, Words in Season* (1859), as pointed out above. Of three missionaries traveling to the Agnostic Island, Timon Phylactery is an enthusiastic Low Churchman and Philip Clerestory is a liberal Broad Churchman. One example of their debates on various religious issues is reported as follows:

This was the sort of debate that went on:—

PHYLACTERY (*in a cold, dry voice*).—This question [debate on “Eternal Punishment”] must be decided, mark you, by inexorable Divine logic. Sin is an offence against the majesty of God. God is infinite; his being is infinite; his memory is infinite; his justice is infinite. . . . Therefore the punishment of sin must be eternal.

CLERESTORY (*with flush and animation*).—But Christ died as an atonement for sin. . . . What is the meaning of the Cross but that God is merciful and magnanimous? (12-13; italics in the original)⁶⁶

By following the customary practice of Victorian newspapers, the opposing positions of Phylactery and Clerestory are “fairly” presented in their full logical power to the reader. If this novel is not read in the intertextual context, Gould might appear as an exceptional

⁶⁶ After giving the full last names for the first conversation, the novel lists only initials.

author with an experimental spirit. After all, the practice of reading a novel separately from its cultural context was neither imaginable nor plausible for Victorians who experienced these multiple genres at the same time, on a daily basis.

This section suggests reading three religious novels, Gresley's *Charles Lever; or, The Man of the Nineteenth Century* (1841), Froude's *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), and Reade's *The Outcast* (1875), with the rich intertextual context in mind. These three novels represent distinct religious opinions: *Charles Lever* is a traditional conversion narrative, and it depicts the conversion of the protagonist, Charles Lever, to the Anglican Church; *The Nemesis of Faith* deals with religious doubt and conversion to the Roman Catholic Church; *The Outcast* is a book about a religious skeptic who leaves his father's religion, the Anglican Church, and eventually invents a religion of his own. Their respective religious opinions are articulated through various subgenres such as letters, memoirs, diaries, and manuscripts. When authors want to explain unexplainable parts of the narration, such as sudden change of mind, decision to convert, and apologetic defense of their religious positions, they tend to incorporate intimate subgenres such as letters and diaries in the narration.

Charles Lever; or, The Man of the Nineteenth Century

Gresley was a "pugnacious champion of the Tractarian movement," although he "remained unsympathetic to Roman Catholicism as well as to later ritualist developments."⁶⁷ After his first novel, *Portrait of an English Churchman*, which successfully ran several editions and gave him public recognition, he started the Englishman's Library series with Edward Churton in 1839 to promote his High Church

⁶⁷ Quoted from S. A. Skinner's "Gresley, William" in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

views. *Charles Lever* was one of the six novels Gresley contributed to the series. According to John Sutherland, “[t]he aim of the series was frankly propagandistic,” and “Gresley’s writing is heavy handed, and interesting only for the light it throws on so-called ‘Condition of England’ fiction in the period” (264). At the beginning of this chapter, we noted that Gresley’s first novel, *Portrait of an English Churchman*, is very “heavy handed” and almost reads like a High Church pamphlet with its strong emphasis on the Catholic Church’s unlimited authority and its via media policy. Chapters are dedicated to expounding the positions of High Churchmen regarding various religious issues: for example, “The One Catholic and Apostolic Church” (chapter 3, in a dialogue between Ridley and Herbert); “The Holy Eucharist” (chapter 8, in a letter sent from Herbert to Ridley); and “Holy Baptism” (chapter 15, in a dialogue between Ridley and Herbert).

While *Charles Lever* supports the High Church position as strongly as *Portrait of an English Churchman*, in regard to the format it is closer to the traditional novel genre. In an introductory frame story, a first-person narrator visits his “old college-friend Basil Morton, the vicar of Laxington” (1). The narrator attends early morning prayer on the day following his arrival, sees there a young man with his old mother, gets interested in the man whose name is Charles Lever, asks about him, and decides to write the story based on what he hears from Charles Lever himself:

My friend [Basil Morton] gave me [the narrator] some further account of the young man [Charles Lever], which so much interested me, that, during my visit at Laxington, I made acquaintance with him, and learned the history of his life from his own lips. On my return home I wrote down the particulars of his

story in the following narrative, which may be described as the life of a *Man of the Nineteenth Century*. (8; italics in the original)

The following main story describes how the protagonist, Charles Lever, goes through conversion after his socialist pursuits. The narrator claims that the story within his frame novel is a true “history” of Charles Lever, acquired from Charles himself, and he writes down the story because of its representability. In fact, the story of a wayward son coming back to the church was a popular theme of contemporary religious tracts, making the narrator’s claim that the story is about “the life of a *Man of the Nineteenth Century*” sound reliable. Relying on the intertextual context, then, the novel endeavors to present its story as real, downplaying the role of imagination.

In the main story, the narrator follows Charles Lever’s story from his childhood to his current year and uses each phase of Charles’s life to illustrate High Church doctrines, each phase resembling a tract in this sense. Each intervention reads like a tract with the strong voice of the narrator illustrating the High Church’s teachings and admonishing the people who dare to digress from the true religion. While the narrator avers that the story is the true history of a member of the contemporary Victorian working class and he chooses to write it down because he sees in it an anticipated consequence of his current society, the other side of the coin is that Gresley finds a tractlike frame works best for presenting his religious opinions. A story of a vicar meeting a working-class man and recording the story is one of the commonest devices of tracts, which were mostly written by real clergymen and presented as real events. In *Charles Lever*, the novel reads like a tract written after the well-known author Gresley visits his clergyman friend. While the novel does not make any strong claim to its authenticity other than the above-quoted

short passage, the overall structure presents the narrator's frequent intervening exhortations as timely comments on the current society's religious condition. If the story is true, the narrator's voice is nothing but a wise solution to the morally and religiously crumbling society.

The first attack the narrator makes on Victorian religious life is about the frivolous disregard of the Anglican Church and its authority. When Charles Lever, a son of John and Hannah Lever, is a boy, his father decides to leave the Anglican Church for the chapel simply because the new clergyman is not as eloquent as his predecessor. John asks, "[W]hat is a church, after all, but a building like a chapel, only one is made of brick and the other of stone? Why should we not go to one as well as the other?" (23). Charles hears the argument, and "the impression left on his mind, by the conversation which he had heard, was, that religion was a matter of private choice and inclination, and that we are to worship God according to our own will or fancy" (28). The ramification of John's hasty proselytization is that Charles "imbibed his father's self-will and love of opposition" more and more and finally openly defied his father, to John's chagrin (35).

At this stage of Charles's life, the narrator introduces one more overall theme of the novel, the lack of proper religious education, lamenting that the preceding clergymen of Laxington ignored "the scriptural doctrine of the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, and the duties and privileges of its members" (11). The narrator states that they mistake "*their own private opinion for the meaning of the Bible,*" and their errors are accordingly greater than those of "the Romanists" (11; italics in the original). Before Charles openly defies his father, the narrator predicts that people who are not taught "the doctrine of the apostolic fellowship, or of Church union" will fall into "latitudinarianism

and dissent,” the lack of proper knowledge in this aspect being the “principal cause of the infidelity and lawlessness which has spread throughout the land” because “*they who acknowledge not God’s authority as exercised by His Church are not likely to yield a willing obedience to any other government*” (19; italics in the original).

Criticism on the Victorian religious education system continues during the next stage of Charles’s life. Gresley was, in fact, so interested in education that he made it the theme of his novel, *Church Clavering; or, The Schoolmaster* (1843), where Gresley serves as the mouthpiece for the High Church’s position on education and argues that church, not the state, should take education in hand. In *Charles Lever*, Gresley’s thoughts are presented via the narrator’s voice when the novel deals with Charles’s school experience. His school teaches him just “a sort of *general* religion” and leads him to become a morally indifferent person (39; italics in the original). Thus, in the “*Civil and Religious Liberty Club*,” where his love of debate and opposition make him a prominent member (56; italics in the original), and as “secretary of the Mechanics’ Institute” later, Charles does not hesitate to “make bold assertions” “without any great regard to truth” and “to speak strongly against the clergy, and consequently against religion” (71, 72, 73). Charles gradually loses his sense of right and wrong altogether. He soon helps a deceitful politician to get elected by scaring some voters away and locking some others “in a barn until the election was over” (90). The narrator seasons his account with frequent warnings and lamentations regarding the morally defective education system and concludes that providing knowledge without teaching about God is like breeding monsters: “*Give them [children] as much of other knowledge as you please; but if you do not give them this*

[“the knowledge of the truth; the knowledge of the word and will of God”], *you give them nothing*” (75; italics in the original).

According to the narrator, for a person without proper religious education, Charles’s downward trajectory is a natural consequence. Charles becomes a disciple of Scipio Suttle, a Socialist who comes to Laxington, and “altogether desert[s] Christian worship” (138). To his pleading father and tearful mother, Charles has a ready retort: “*If they thought fit to leave the Church, he had an equal right to leave the Chapel*; if they had chosen for themselves one form of religion, he had an equal right to choose another” (138). While Charles realizes the true character of the Socialists after some time, he is not ready to admit his misjudgment.

The reader is given a chance to hear both a Socialist’s and church’s viewpoints when Charles visits a new vicar, Morton of Laxington. Charles has an opportunity to listen to a sermon given by Morton when he marches to the church with armed Chartists. Confronted by the mob, Morton calmly gives a convincing sermon and invites the Chartists to repent:

[W]hence arises this strange repugnance in the heart of man against his Maker? *Is it that men are happy in living without God in the world?* The drunkard, the sensualist, the rioter, the agitator, the turbulent, the scoffer, the blasphemer, are they happy in their blasphemy, their scoffing, their rioting, their drunkenness, and their impurities? . . .

O, that poor sinful man would but allow his better feelings and his conscience to influence him, and turn to God, before it be too late, with a humble and contrite spirit! O, that any words of mine could prevail on those amongst you

who have suffered yourselves to be deceived and misguided,—that I could induce you to look upon God as your loving Father rather than your Judge, and His law not as a law of condemnation . . . but as a most blessed declaration of mercy and loving-kindness!” (147-49)

Charles is so touched and moved by the sermon that he visits Morton for advice. Their conversation is presented as if it were recorded word for word and noted down later.

Charles starts by explaining that he is a Socialist to Morton:

Lever. “It is perhaps best, sir, that I spare your time, by coming at once to the point. Let me confess to you that I am a Socialist. . . . I have doubted, I cannot say disbelieved, the existence and the providence of God; and have taken no care to live according to His laws. But I begin to have great misgivings on the subject. . . . Your sermon of to-day, sir, has much affected me. You have described so accurately what has often passed in my own mind, that I have made bold to come and seek your further counsel.”

Mr. Morton. “Be assured that I will do my best to aid you; and with the book of God before me, I hope I may promise that my aid will not be ineffectual.”
(153-54; italics in the original)

Their conversation continues in this style for some time, dwelling on Charles’s questions regarding the existence of evil in this world and the sin of man. The presentation of this conversation makes it seem as if the reader is reading a real interview between a skeptical Socialist and a vicar, for quoting conversation in the same format was a widely used practice in legal reports.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ See, for example, the following quote from “Police Intelligence”:

John Lever's (re)conversion to the Anglican Church relies on various narratological devices, such as direct dialogue, direct dialogue in a traditional third-person narrative, and a letter. When Charles hesitates about whether he should recover, his mind is depicted in direct dialogues, first, between Morton and himself and, later, between his old Christian friend, Joseph Franklin, and himself. Direct dialogue delivers each side's voice clearly, and the reader is invited to ask with the skeptic or answer with the church's advocates. Charles gets seriously wounded after in a riot, and he broods over his past and possible conversion. Morton visits Charles at this point, and they have another long conversation, which is presented in the traditional way of recording a direct dialogue form in a third-person narrative novel. Charles's eventual conversion is recorded in a more intimate subgenre, a letter to Franklin. Now that Charles has inward conviction, the conversation mode is shifted to a letter form, and Charles directly confesses to the state of his mind in the letter: "Deeply indeed do I now repent my folly and madness. . . . Let me conclude by entreating your forgiveness and your prayers. You know not the anguish of guilt and remorse. Pray for me" (219-20).

Utilizing various subgenres and a frame novel effectively presents all the aspects of the agonizing and later repentant protagonist. Charles's physical appearance and the reason for presenting the story are recorded by the narrator in the frame story. Charles draws the narrator's attention with his "features . . . [that] were intelligent and strongly marked—the sort of features which, when once seen, are not easily forgotten" (7). There was "a mild and subdued lustre in his eye, which spoke of storms subsided, and a heart at

The Lord Mayor: What became of it [the last quarter's payment the complainant missed]?—Complainant: Why, my Lord, I went into Rowland Hill's chapel to pray, and somebody whipped it out of my pocket, I suppose.

See also "Summary of Assize Intelligence, Tipperary" and "Assize Intelligence."

rest” (7). His inner thoughts are presented in dialogues and letters, which are supposed to be Charles’s own, not the narrator’s. The narrator adds explanations and voices his religious opinions to season the story. Various subgenres such as letter and sermons and narrative devices are fully utilized to deliver the story in a true-to-life format.

The Nemesis of Faith

The Nemesis of Faith, “[t]he most notorious religious novel of the century,” also employs various devices that contemporary tracts have frequently used to allow the reader to experience the story as realistically as possible (Sutherland 458). The narrator, Arthur, insists that the novel is not just a story but a “history” of a real person, Markham, and he introduces himself as a close friend of Markham who is in possession of Markham’s manuscripts and letters; Arthur says he decided to publish them because Markham’s story is the story of many contemporary Victorians.⁶⁹ Arthur’s introduction to Markham’s manuscript, which he writes in Italy, runs as follows:

Among other matters with which he [Markham] entertained himself in this Italian winter was a retrospective sketch, which to me [Arthur], as I read it, appeared of a value quite unspeakable as an analysis of a process through which in these last years so many minds besides his own have been slowly and silently devolving. I

⁶⁹ The way the novel treats the letters and manuscripts as if they are real probably triggered the idea to add the subtitle, *The History of Markham Sutherland*, later in the third edition. The first edition and the second edition that came out in 1849 do not bear the subtitle. The only big change in the second edition is that it includes the author’s preface, where Froude denies the rumor that the novel’s love plot is autobiographical. But the third edition that came out 1903, with the introduction by Moncure D. Conway, has the subtitle that neither the first edition nor the second has, and Conway claims that it is the true reprint of the second edition, the final authorial edition: “About thirty five years ago it occurred to me that it would be a useful thing to reissue those novels [Novels that deal with the Tractarian Movement],—mostly out of print,—as a series. I consulted Froude, with whom I was working on his magazine (*Fraser*) and he offered no objection to the reprinting of his *Nemesis of Faith*” (vii). The first and second editions were published in London by John Chapman. The third came out in London, published by George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., and in New York, by E. P. Dutton & Co.

had intended to mutilate it, but that each page pleaded with so much earnestness to be the one that I was to choose, that I could only satisfy all by taking all. It is not long, it was broken off abruptly, we shall see by and by how broken; but it is carried down to a point when we can link it on with no too serious aposiopeses to those first letters which have already caused in us feelings which I will not endeavour to analyse, lest I find in myself more sympathy with them than I wish to think I feel. (98)

With this introduction the manuscript, “Confessions of a Sceptic” as it is titled, is presented to the reader. Stating that the manuscript is the exemplary story of many contemporary minds, the narrator, Arthur, points to the previous letters from Markham as the early germ of the eventual development of Markham’s thoughts. Throughout the novel, Arthur mentions that he has received letters and manuscripts from his friend and describes the editorial decision he made when he decided to publish them for the benefit of the public. Arthur the editor tells the reader that he realizes he cannot pick and choose only parts of Markham’s writings because “[s]cepticism, like wisdom, springs out in full panoply only from the brain of a god, and it is little profit to see an idea in its growth, unless we track its seed to the power which sowed it” (97-98).

Along with the “editorial” note of Arthur, *The Nemesis of Faith* relies on various intimate subgenres in the novel to present it as realistically as possible: ten letters from Markham to Arthur, some excerpts of Markham that illustrate how his mind seeks answers to his skepticism in philosophy, and the final manuscript of Markham at the end of the letters. There are only four interventions of the narrator throughout the novel, and they are given only when more explanations are necessary for the reader to move on to

the following letters or manuscripts. Letters are mostly given dates and places, too. For example, the first letter from Markham to Arthur is dated 4 September 1848, from Huntley Parsonage where Markham's father holds a living.

The letter is so intimate a genre as to function as the best narrative space for the unorganized and confused mind of Markham. In the first letter Markham excuses his long silence, explaining his situation at home. His father wants the now twenty-four-year-old Markham to find a living, but Markham does not know what he wants to be yet. He cannot "keep [his] private conscience distinct from [his] professional conscience," as he explains, and wants to take a year or two before he decides (2-3). His father laughs at him and gives his advice against it:

You say you wish to be a man, Markham . . . and not a professional man. . . . If you think you can temper yourself into manliness by sitting here over your books, supposing you will grow into it as a matter of course by a rule of necessity, in the same way as your body grows old, it is the very silliest fancy that ever tempted a young man into his ruin. You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one. Go out into life, you will find your chance there, and only there. You ask to wait. It is like a timid boy waiting on the river bank to take his plunge. The longer he stands shivering, the harder he finds it. At the year's end you will see more difficulties than you see now, because you yourself will have grown feebler. Wait one more, and then you will most likely go on to the end, into your second childhood of helplessness. (4-5)

Markham's older and younger brothers are professionally settled down, and he is considered a dreamer, but Markham confesses he cannot move on. After writing down

his father's advice, Markham miserably asks Arthur: "What shall I do, Arthur? It is so true every word of this. I feel it is. I know it is; and it is shameful, indeed, to rust into nothingness. Yet what to do!" (5). He is generally thought to be destined for the church, but he cannot think of becoming a clergyman for a living. Worst of all, he cannot share his thoughts with anyone in the family.

Other letters record similar problems of Markham with a very personal style and tone, always begging Arthur to understand him and give advice. In the next letter written only two days later, Markham explains that subscription to the Thirty-Nine articles is one of the reasons that prevents him from being ordained: "Arthur, before I can be made a clergyman, I must declare that I unfeignedly believe all 'the canonical writings of the Old Testament;' and I cannot. What does it mean—unfeignedly believe it all?" (10). He also cannot believe in the vengeful, bloodthirsty God of the Old Testament. He confesses to Arthur that he cannot imagine himself teaching the suffering poor to believe in this God and turn to Him with trusting, hopeful eyes. As radical and irreligious as Markham's letters are, his tone and style remind the reader that these words were initially designed for a closer friend's eyes only ("Arthur, bear with me, and at least hear me" [10-11]) and written, presumably, before Markham could organize his ideas, as the beginning of the next letter also shows: "I did not say half I wished to say, Arthur: ever since I wrote I have been thinking how confusedly and stupidly I expressed myself" (20). In revealing his reasons gradually, Markham uses a pleading voice. The depressed tone of the letters conveys Markham's suffering to the reader little by little. Markham reveals his tormented mind almost shamefacedly, hesitates in his words, admits that he might be wrong, but

still confesses that he cannot honestly move on to become a clergyman as his father wishes with these thoughts in his mind.

Because *Nemesis of Faith* heavily relies on letters, it can reveal Markham's chaotic mind little by little, allowing it to receive full attention at each stage and also making it possible for Froude to represent the process of Markham's deconversion in a realistic way. In *Charles Lever* the letter is used to record a moment of conversion; here, letters and manuscripts are adapted to depict the long process of deconversion and the final, unexpected conversion to the Roman Catholic Church. The first letter only tells of his confused mind and his inability to find a profession. In the second letter, he says he finds it impossible to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles and to believe in the God of the Old Testament. He confesses that he still believes in "His religion—not *the Christian religion*, but *the religion of Christ*—the poor man's gospel; the message of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of love" and wishes that he could be a clergyman of that religion: "[O]h, how gladly would I spend my life, in season and out of season, in preaching this!" (18-19, 19). In the third letter dated on 11 September, Markham confesses more of his dark doubts. He cannot believe that the Bible is written by inspiration and he does not understand why he should believe in a Jewish God. In this letter Markham appears to be an atheist rather than a tormented Christian, but the next letter, sent to Arthur a week later, again presents him as a hopelessly depressed man who cannot live without God, yet who cannot honestly say that he believes all he is taught. In the second letter, Markham already said that "I believe that we may find in the Bible the highest and purest religion . . . most of all in the history of Him in whose name we all are called" (18). He still writes as a Christian, using "we" instead of "they" when he refers to the body of Christians. Letter

4 presents him as a deeply depressed man who wishes to die, and his only relief comes from writing to Arthur: “I can do nothing but write to you, dear Arthur. You must bear with me—I am sure you will; it is so inexpressible a relief to me. My feelings have begun to flow to you, and it is unsafe to check an opening wound” (29). His mind, he says, is wounded, implying that it can be healed and he can return to the church in time. He seeks Arthur’s advice and asks for his opinions, imploring him not to be harsh on him. In the next short letter sent on 20 September, he writes that his home is almost unbearable because nobody understands him and he cannot do anything but wait for the healing of his mind: “I wait for guidance, and my soul must have it, if I give it time” (36).

The forlorn tone of Markham’s letters and his continual pleading for advice form the setting for Markham’s remarks on the religious practices of those around him and the defense of his position as seen in his reports of a crisis in the next letter, sent to Arthur on 10 October. A bishop offers Markham a living through his father. Desperate, Markham goes to his uncle, a dean, and confesses all of his doubts. To Markham’s surprise, the dean is not surprised or disappointed:

He said he was not at all surprised, not that he thought there was anything particularly wrong about myself which should have led me astray, but my case he said was the case of almost all young men of talent before they passed from the school of books into that of life. (38-39)

His uncle treats doubts as a disorder and advises him to act:

[H]e said . . . I must remember that the real discipline of the mind is *action*, not speculation; and regular activity alone could keep soul or body from disease. To sit still and think was simply fatal; a morbid sensitiveness crept over the feelings

like the nervous tenderness of an unhealthy body, and unless I could rouse myself to exertion, there would be no end at all to the disorder of which I complained.

(39)

Even with comfort and encouragement from his uncle, however, Markham does not know what to do and asks for Arthur's advice, which must have come in time since the next letter thanks Arthur for his answer: "Thank you a thousand times, my dear, dear friend, for your most kind, most wise letter. I will try, as you tell me, to have done with these inane speculations" (45). The next letter written on the first day of 1844 says Markham is now a deacon in Morville, a large town. He is advised to "persist in such sensible moderation" and flattered that "with [his] talents, in these trying times, [he] should be an ornament to the Church, and that its highest places might be open to [him]" (51). Yet Markham is still tormented with his doubts.

The narrator intervenes here to explain that almost one year has passed since the last letter and nothing great has happened to Markham during that time. Letters 9 and 10 follow without dates and tell how Markham was tricked into declaring his doubts in public. He has made many enemies already by not presenting "religious tea-parties" and not hesitating to show his feelings (57). He does not patronize any societies, avoids his fellow clergymen, and shows no interest in the social life of the town. At a dinner party a recently arrived rector of his neighborhood asks Markham to join the Bible society and throws insinuations until the heated Markham makes a public declaration of his unbelief in the Bible:

I dislike societies generally; I would join in none of them. For your society in particular, as you insist on my telling you, I think it is the very worst, with the

establishment of which I have been acquainted. Considering all the heresies, the enormous crimes, the wickednesses, the astounding follies which the Bible has been made to justify, and which its indiscriminate reading has suggested; considering that it has been, indeed, the sword which our Lord said that he was sending; that not the Devil himself could have invented an implement more potent to fill the hated world with lies, and blood, and fury; I think, certainly, that to send hawkers over the world loaded with copies of this book, scattering it in all places among all persons—not teaching them to understand it; not standing, like Moses, between that heavenly light and them; but cramming it into their own hands as God's book, which He wrote, and they are to read, each for himself, and learn what they can for themselves—is the most culpable folly of which it is possible for man to be guilty. (63)

The rector triumphantly declares that “the enemy is among us,” charging Markham as a Socinian to the bishop (64). Markham is summoned by the bishop and confesses all. Markham has “felt [his] uneasiness not pass away, but deepen into conviction,” and he welcomes this opportunity to speak out (73). The grieved bishop weeps and keeps silent for some time:

After perhaps a quarter of an hour, he seemed to make an effort to collect himself. . . . Presently he turned to me, and said with a voice of mournful kindness, “May God help you, my son! It is a terrible trial. Only He who is pleased to send such temptation can give you strength to bear it. You shall have my prayers . . . and my blessing . . . not as your bishop, Markham. I cannot bless you as your bishop. But as an old man and an old friend, who can still love you, and feel for you, yes, such

a blessing you shall not want, my poor, poor boy.” There were tears in his eyes. . .
 . I could not contain myself. I burst into tears too. I caught his hand and kissed it.
 He did not take it from me; but his eyes were seeking heaven and God, and his
 lips were fast moving. (74)

The bishop says that he hopes Markham becomes “a chosen champion of the Church” with his “mind of no common order” and advises him to travel for three years and see if his mind remains the same (75).

After this letter, the narrator steps in to explain the situation further, and some excerpts of Markham’s thoughts while he studies philosophy at his unhappy home among his disappointed family follow. The excerpts show that now that he has shed the cloth, Markham has become more daring in his thoughts. He boldly asks, “Why is it thought so very wicked to be an unbeliever?” and declares that “[t]he source of all superstition is the fear of having offended God, the sense of something within ourselves which we call sin” and “[s]in, therefore, as commonly understood, is a chimera” (84, 90, 92). The narrator then tells the reader that philosophy does not provide answers to Markham’s skepticism, and Markham goes to Italy. Arthur mentions that he has received one more letter at that time, but he does not include the letter: “[O]ne day I had a letter from him of the old sort, of which his heart, not his head, had had the making” (97). In the unlisted letter, Markham tells Arthur that he is not well and has decided to spend a winter alone at Como, Italy. The confession manuscript then is introduced as the document that registers the final development of Markham’s mind. The narrator speaks out only one more time to report what happened after Markham abruptly ended the manuscript.

The confession manuscript remorsefully looks back at Markham's happy childhood and peaceful Sundays. Until he turned sixteen, he did not have any trouble in his mind, but he found that he could not reconcile what he had been taught in Christianity with Greek philosophy: "What, gentlemen, do you suppose that I am to make friends with Socrates and Phocion, and believe that human nature is full of the devil, and that only baptism can give chance for a holy life?" (130). Yet Markham cannot bear to live without his childhood religion. His mind begins to drift away from the old secure world, yet he cannot find a satisfactory alternative. He is in despair:

Wo to the unlucky man who as a child is taught, even as a portion of his creed, what his grown reason must forswear. Faith endures no barking of the surface; it is a fair, delicate plant transported out of Paradise into an alien garden, where surest care alone can foster it. But wound the tenderest shoot—but break away one single flower, and though it linger on for years, feeding upon stimulants and struggling through a languishing vitality, it has had its death-blow; the blighted juices fly trembling back into the heart, never to venture out again. (124-25)

Then, Catholic influence at home triggers him to doubt the existence of miracles, and, eventually, the Bible itself.

The manuscript parodies the traditional conversion narrative in a sense that it shows how Markham undergoes the process of deconversion, from his childhood Christian religion to skepticism. The title, "Confessions of a Sceptic," is a parody of many famous cases of confession, where a sinner confesses his or her sins and returns to the church. Its beginning records the common yearning of mankind, which in the traditional conversion narrative ends with a hearty embrace of Christianity:

That there is something very odd about this life of ours, that it is a kind of Egyptian bondage, where a daily tale of bricks must be given in, yet where we have no straw given us wherewith to burn them, is a very old confession indeed. We cry for something we cannot find; we cannot satisfy ourselves with what we do find, and there is more than cant in that yearning after a better land of promise, as all men know when they are once driven in upon themselves, and compelled to be serious. (99)

His happy childhood religion is presented to the reader retrospectively. It is very interesting that Markham looks back with remorseful eyes as a sinner with a Christian background does: “Alas, alas, for the change! as I write, I seem for a moment to feel the old pulsations: but it is all gone away—gone like a dream in the morning—gone with the fairy-peopled world where then I thought we had our dwelling” (118). Markham says he “had been trained in rigid Protestantism” (121). But Markham’s spiritual journey causes him to drift further from his past religion as he grows old. The first big blow comes from the Catholic influence at home: “Just as I was leaving off being a boy, we fell under a strong Catholicising influence at home, and I used to hear things which were strange enough to my ear” (122). He reads about martyrs and miracles and finds himself doubting about the existence of miracles. Like a future convert in a traditional conversion narrative, he remembers clearly the first turning point of his life, and Markham pinpoints his first step to deconversion:

I believe I may date from this point the first disturbance my mind experienced, and, however long I went on laying the blame upon myself, I never recovered it. I said to myself, if this miracle was not a miracle, how do I know there ever were

miracles? This was easily answered, because one sort were in Scripture, and the other only in Southey's book. But as to fulfilment of prophecy, if this was not fulfilment, then what was? we could never be sure of any of it. (123)

Following the fashion of the traditional tracts that directly speak to the target audience, Markham addresses his imaginative enemies as “you,” as if his writing is a special tract for them. Catholics are addressed as “you,” and Markham poses lots of questions and charges against them:

If you recoil from this conclusion, then, in God's name, have done with your covenant and your theory, and do not in the same breath allow and disallow human excellence as a title to heaven, or the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of matter must be called in to help you in your dividings.

A few more words shall be said to you, of which you shall not like the hearing. I will not prejudge you; but, if you believe what you say, to allow us to go on feeding ourselves upon the literature of those old glorious Greeks and Romans . . . is the most barbarous snare which was ever laid before the feet of weak humanity. And you do this—you who profess the care of our souls! Ah, if you did care for them, you would up and gird yourselves, and cry—Leave them, leave them, they are heathens! Learn your Greek in Athanasius, and your Latin in Augustine. Those were God's enemies whom He had not chosen, and therefore has rejected. The more dangerous because they look so like His friends; but splendid sinners, as the wise fathers called them. (129-30)

As a deconvert, Markham faithfully records each phase of his spiritual journey. He first analyzes Catholicism and concludes that it is not a real answer for anyone whose purpose

is to find a true religion. Then, he leads his reader to a further conclusion that denies Christianity altogether: “It was enough for me to learn, as now I soon did, that all real arguments against Catholicism were, in fact, arguments against Christianity” (148). Then Markham finally declares that he now is ready to stand alone, rather than accept a false religion for the temporary relief of his tormented mind: “For myself I fell off; not because I had determined not to follow, but because I had not yet felt this intensity of hunger and of thirst which could drive me to accept the alternative, and consent to so entire an abandonment of myself” (161).

The manuscript ends with one more parody of spiritual vision, where Markham is elevated up into space to see the earth from above. This kind of vision that describes a person’s spirit moved by an angel or God appears many times in the Bible—for example, as experienced by Daniel, Ezekiel, Paul, and John.⁷⁰ Markham’s vision in space makes him to ask one last question to Christianity and concludes his manuscript:

My eyes were opening slowly to see for myself the strangeness of this being of ours. I had flung myself off into space, and seen this little earth ball careering through its depths; this miserable ball, not a sand grain in the huge universe of suns, and yet to which such a strangely mysterious destiny was said to have been attached. I had said to myself, Can it be that God, Almighty God; He, the Creator himself, went down and took the form of one of those miserable insects crawling on its surface, and died Himself to save their souls? I had asked the question. Did ever man ask it honestly, and answer *yes*? Many men have

⁷⁰ While Daniel, Paul, and John are apocalyptically moved to the world they do not understand, Ezekiel is moved to Jerusalem while he is exiled in Babylonia.

asked it with a foregone conclusion; but that is not to ask it. I say, did ever man who doubted find his own heart give him back the Church's answer?

I know not. I answered nothing; but I went down again upon my old earth home; and, with no anxiety for claiming any so high kindred for my race, I felt myself one among them; I felt that they were my brothers, and among them my lot was cast. I could not wish them to be children of heaven; neither could I make away their weaker ones to hell; they were all my fellows; I could feel with them all, and love them all. For me this world was neither so high nor so low as the Church would have it; chequered over with its wild light shadows, I could love it and all the children of it, more dearly, perhaps, because it was not all light. "These many men so beautiful," they should be neither God's children nor the Devil's children, but children of men. (162-63)

Arthur says the manuscript ends abruptly here. The conclusion presents Markham as a follower of a religion of his own, which combines the love for your neighbor of Christianity with his Socinian denial of the divine origin of Christ.

Having presented the long deconversion process in letters, excerpts, and manuscripts, *Nemesis of Faith* in its last part records the consequence of Markham's religious choice. Arthur describes Markham's days in Italy, where he falls in love with a married woman, Helen Leonard. Helen has been married without knowing what love is, and her husband is bored living alone with her. Unsuspecting Mr. Leonard invites Markham to stay at his house, and relieved that his wife now has a good companion, he goes to another part of Italy to enjoy himself. Left together, Helen and Markham soon fall in love with each other and try to conceal their attachment, but they are unable to control

their passion. While they talk about their future, the only child of Helen is exposed to a cold wind and dies. Surprisingly, Markham reads the accident as the smiting hand of the God he does not believe in: “[H]e felt God had spoken to him, and he was slowly moulding in himself his answer. Was it the voice of warning, or the voice of judgment?” (195). Helen thinks that her child was punished for her sin, but for Helen, her sin is that she has married a man without love:

“Markham,” she said, “it is for my sin. Would, oh, would it had been myself, not she, who has been taken! It is for my sin in marrying her father. It was an offence against earth and Heaven, and the earthly trace of it is blotted out, and its memory written in my heart in letters of fire. Now, Markham, if I am not to die too, take me away. I can never see him again.” (199)

Unable to bear his torments any longer, Markham decides to commit suicide. With the poison raised to his lips, however, Markham is interrupted by a priest, Frederick Mornington, who turns out to be an old teacher of Markham in his college years. Mornington has left the Anglican Church, and he is traveling to Rome when he finds Markham at this moment. Stunned, Markham passively accepts the interruption as God’s will, submits to Mornington’s invitation of a full confession, and enters a monastery.

Although the novel’s ending might be quite disappointing to the reader who has followed the plot with deep interest in a skeptic’s spiritual journey, *Nemesis of Faith* is a notoriously complex novel, and it refuses to be categorized as a novel with an unsatisfactory finale. As a whole, *Nemesis of Faith* seems to argue that leaving one’s religion without an alternative religion cannot but produce moral corruption and end with the destruction of reason, which presumably triggers the final abrupt reconversion. Yet

read from its tractlike structure, each letter and manuscript closely and plausibly shows the development of a mind that only too seriously seeks the truth. The irony of the novel is that the final destiny of a vigorous mind that restlessly searches for the truth is spiritual suicide in a monastery. In this sense, the novel presents Markham's story as a warning for many contemporary Victorians who could not find an alternative when they launched their spiritual journey, leaving the hitherto safe and secure harbor of Christianity. They ambitiously embark to find the truth, making their reason the sole guide for their journey, only to succumb to the Roman Catholic Church, presumably for most Protestant Victorians the most tyrannical religious institute that forbids the use of private judgment. The well-established Victorian conversion narrative, with its reliance on the letter and intimate genres for the moment of conversion, and the Victorian Protestants' emphasis on private judgment make it possible to understand the complexity and paradox of *Nemesis of Faith*'s deconversion narrative.

The Outcast

The Outcast is an autobiographical novel by William Winwood Reade, a nephew of the more literally successful Charles Reade. William Reade was well known for his defiance of established Christianity, and in this final novel that was published in his last year, he seems to include every possible reason to leave Christianity behind as a remnant from the age of superstition. Reade twists the logic and devices of the traditional conversion narrative, such as books, letters, derangement scenes, visions, family ties, and marriage, to use them in his attack on Christianity, to show how the protagonist's agnostic mind develops over time and how self-contradictory traditional Christianity is.

Epistolary style is adopted again to voice opinions as if they were actually from a real person. Out of a total of sixteen letters, the first two letters are directed to Frank, who is the son-in-law of Edward Mordaunt, the protagonist, and the rest are written to Edward's daughter, Ellen. And the family religion that tracts preached again and again is deployed to reveal the self-contradictory nature of Christianity.

The first two letters directed to Frank begin with a record of the tragic religious trajectory of a young man named Arthur Elliot to reveal Edward's religious view. A tragedy is caused when a passionately devout Arthur encounters modern science and knowledge. While in the traditional conversion narrative books from the Bible are mentioned at the turning point of a sinner's life, here Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* and Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* are listed as the fatal stumbling blocks that forever shatter Arthur's mind. And Arthur also experiences a vision, where he sees higher beings watching humans on the earth with indifference.

The first letter begins in a quite familiar style. It is directed to the son-in-law, who has just come back from an overseas trip with Edward's daughter: "My dear Frank,—I welcome you back to your native land, and take it for granted that you and Ellen are tired enough of travelling" (1). Then Edward says he will hold "[his] latest budget of news about the tenants, and the harvest, and the pets" till later because he cannot think of anything else except a tragedy, the account of which Edward assumes Frank must have read about in the newspapers (1). Now that Ellen is away from Frank for a week, Edward thinks it safe to share the story with Frank, who not only knows Edward's religious opinion but also seems to share it. In the second letter, to which Edward attaches the manuscripts of Arthur, he states that Frank will be able to "enjoy" them without

experiencing any “trembl[ing] in [his] shoes” because Frank has already “climbed above theology, as the Alpine mountaineer above the clouds” (18, 18-19).

Arthur is “the only son of a wealthy landed proprietor,” a talented and passionately religious person since his early childhood (2). According to Edward, who has read with Arthur and known him for a long time, “religion was the poetry and passion of his [Arthur’s] life” (2):

Sometimes when we were together in a deep green wood on a sultry summer afternoon; or sometimes walking at night beneath the glorious starlit sky; or sometimes, when reading the dialogues of Plato, some divine thought rose from the book like an immortal spirit from the grave, and passed into his soul, then the tears would stream from his eyes, and falling on his knees he would utter praises or prayers in words of surpassing eloquence, and with a voice of the sweetest melody. And often . . . at such times his gestures grew wild and almost furious, his utterance was choked, and a strange bubbling sound came from his mouth. (2-3)

Arthur’s parents are advised by a doctor to send him abroad, away from his books, but Arthur does not want to go and remains at home. One day he comes to Edward in despair. He has read Malthus’s *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, and “it made him doubt the goodness of God” for the first time (4). At this time Edward just comforts Arthur “with the usual commonplace remarks” (4). Later Arthur reads *On the Origin of Species*, and from that time on Arthur begins to “show symptoms of insanity—which disease it is thought he inherited from one of his progenitors”: “He dressed always in black, and said that he was in mourning for mankind. The works of Malthus and Darwin, bound in

sombre covers, were placed on a table in his room; the first was lettered outside, *The Book of Doubt*, and the second, *The Book of Despair*” (5). Derangement scenes, popular devices used to return protagonists to “right” religious positions, are used here to point to the noxious effect of early religious teachings.⁷¹ In his solitary walks Arthur is often seen gesticulating to the sky or sitting alone on the road. At this time Edward reveals his religious opinions to Arthur: “It was then I thought it right to express my own opinions on the subject of theology. But though Arthur could cease to love and revere, he could not cease to believe” (6). However, the reader does not get a glimpse into the inner conviction of Edward here. From what follows it seems plausible that Edward is an unbeliever who has reached the final destination of his spiritual journey and found peace and comfort in his conclusion, yet the reader is not to know his views in this first letter. Arthur is thought to be safe for a time when he is engaged to be married to a girl who “possess[es] some tranquillising power,” but soon she gets infected from nursing a poor sick child and dies (8). At the funeral, Arthur completely loses his mind, and he is confined in a private asylum. Arthur has visions/dreams there and leaves a record of them behind when he commits suicide. Neither marriage nor vision has redeeming power in this novel.

Arthur’s manuscripts are introduced in letter 2, with a note to read and put them aside before Ellen comes back. Edward confesses that he educated his daughter to believe in the God of his creation, which is better than the traditional Christian God:

I feared that for her my faith would be but a system of cold and comfortless philosophy, and that if at some future time, in adversity or suffering, a religion became necessary to her, she would run no slight risk of falling into Superstition.

⁷¹ The next chapter will discuss the derangement scenes in detail.

I saved her from that danger, by teaching her to believe in a God, compared with whom the God of the Bible is a very indifferent character. . . . I formed her a God of the purest and noblest ideas, and she still believes it to be real. (16-17)

Edward advises Frank not to show the manuscripts, saying that he is afraid that reading them would cause her not to believe in the God of her childhood and to become a skeptic.

The following manuscript, titled “A New Thing under the Moon,” is the account of “a series of dreams” that, according to Arthur himself, is “[Arthur’s] theory of Cause and Creation, [which] is the best that has even been propounded” because “[i]t explains all the facts of history and nature, is in harmony with science, and is supported by analogy” (19, 20). In his three vision-dreams, Arthur clearly posits himself as comparable to biblical characters, as Markham does, although he states that he “shall not claim for it [his vision] the name of Revelation as other dreamers have done” (20). Following other biblical characters’ vision narratives, Arthur starts his record as follows: “I dreamt, first of all, I was standing, as it seemed to me, in Space, and I had a curious kind of impression that the Infinite was not too large, but just the right size for a person of my dimensions” (20-21). Soon he learns that he has become a gigantic creature, one of “the Demigods, whose kingdom [he] had entered,” and he is looking down on the solar system in an “amphitheatre or circus” with other demigods (23). They are all watching the dramas on the earth, and to his surprise, Arthur recognizes some of the characters in the dramas. He soon finds out why: “Then I understood that this earth-life of ours is only a satirical play, that our great men are caricatures of famous demigods, their vicissitudes and actions, ingenious lampoons” (26-27). Unable to indifferently watch, like these demigods, the agony of his fellow human beings, Arthur flees into space, but he hears the

audience “hooting and shouting, *Off! off! Shame! Apologise! Where is the Lord Chamberlain?*” (29; italics in the original). The drama is over, and he wakes up with tears on his cheeks. The last dream takes Arthur to “a Demigod club where [he] found the . . . critique in a periodical lying on the table” (33). The review is about the drama on the earth Arthur has just watched, and Arthur learns that the humans’ sufferings and joys are but a drama that has been created for the amusement of the demigods: “The custom of creating worlds, and of peopling them with animated beings who reflect the vices or follies of the day, or offer an example of ideal virtues and moral excellence, has of late become popular in art” (33). The review criticizes “[t]he anonymous drama which has just been performed” as a novice’s work (34). The life of earth is simply an inexperienced author’s first work, whose theme is “the doctrine of Improvement” (38-39). Human beings’ religions are seen as “the satire on theology” of those visionary demigods who try to explain “the First Cause” in some way:

We think that the satire on theology is wholesome and just. Nothing could be more ludicrous than to see these ephemeral beings, these creatures of a moment, building little houses in honour of the First Cause, and glibly explaining mysteries which *we* do not profess to understand . . . for how can we know that we are not in the same relative position to beings of a higher race as those pigmies we create to ourselves? (39-40; italics in the original)

The review harshly criticizes the drama as unnecessarily cruel. The earth is “a vast slaughter-house” since “[t]he law of evolution is the law of death” and the author has added “numerous painful and lingering diseases” (45). Asking, “Who could view that melancholy Earth, and those writhing masses of humanity, who could hear those

agonizing cries without a shudder of pain and a glow of honest indignation against the Author of such woes and wrongs?" the review ends with a remark that "[w]hen next he [the author] produces a world let it be one which we can take our wives and daughters to see" (46, 47).

Arthur's life and his manuscripts function as the epitome of Edward's life: the harmful effect of early religious teachings, books as the initiator of the deconversion process, marriage as a precipitating dose for the final denial of God, and sickness and derangement without any redeeming power. Arthur's manuscripts are followed by seven more letters from Edward to Ellen, who somehow has read the manuscripts of Arthur and begun to doubt the God about whom his father carefully has taught her. Edward's spiritual journey to a new religion is little by little introduced to the reader in these letters written in a familiar tone. The story is quite similar to that of Arthur. Edward loses his faith on reading the work of Charles Lyell and other scientific books, and although he is successful in obtaining his love despite his religious positions, they lead a miserable marital life when Edward leaves his living to work as a hired editor in London. Because of severe eye disease, Edward loses his job and eventually his wife, living in misery and poverty before he finds his own religion.

Unlike the reports of many religious societies that show how important early childhood Christian education is in general, Edward's narrative argues that early religious education is pointless or rather harmful because a grown-up finds it hard to believe in the myth he or she is taught yet cannot seem to live without it. Arthur's, Edward's, and now Ellen's stories all show the futile or harmful nature of bringing up a child with a belief. Arthur goes insane when he cannot reconcile what he knows with what he wants to

believe; Edward spends miserable years trying to find a new religion that can replace what he has left behind; now Ellen, despite Edward's careful teaching, doubts her God on reading a single manuscript. On the other hand, Edward's father converts to Christianity, despite his earlier life of dissipation and pleasure, when he hears a field preacher and becomes a strict Calvinistic clergyman whose sole ambition for life is to make his son following his steps. Religious choice does not have anything to do with earlier teachings, according to the novel.

The first letter to Ellen has a device to raise curiosity. Ellen repeatedly tells her father that she sees in her mind "a strange and horrible scene" whenever she approaches anything dead:

[Ellen] see[s] a bare and squalid room—the walls blackened with dirt, the broken window-panes stuffed with rags. On the floor a woman with long yellow hair; beside her a man on his knees dressed in a ragged black coat; behind him some men and woman of coarse and evil countenance, yet grave and sad, whispering together. (50-51)

The scene is not one that a gentle wealthy young lady might have dreamed or even imagined since the depicted room is not somewhere Ellen might have visited. However, the following letters reveal that Ellen has actually seen the scene with her eyes in her early childhood. Edward is the man on the floor. And the dead woman is actually Ellen's dead mother, Margaret, who died in misery and poverty when Edward lost his job due to his eye disease. The letter ends with Edward's promise to tell Ellen all:

You shall now learn what was this scene which your memory has faithfully though fitfully retained. You shall learn how your father was an outcast,

reduced to the extremity of sorrow, to the brink of despair; how his misfortunes resembled, but exceeded those of the unhappy [Arthur] Elliott, and how narrowly he escaped a similar fate. (51)

As the letter says, Edward's and Arthur's lives have many similarities. They both lose their faith over reading books on recent scientific discoveries, and they both lose their loved ones. Edward launches his career as a clergyman first, but he soon loses his faith when he reads Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and some other books on recent scientific discoveries. Believing that "it [is] [his] duty to study the enemy's arguments in order to be able to refute them," Edward peruses the books and loses his faith altogether (101). He reads the Bible again, but "the scales fell from [his] eyes"; he now feels "burning shame" that he could "ever have credited the many profane and ridiculous fables contained in the Bible" (104). He gives up his living, marries Ellen's mother, and leads a poor but contented life as a writer for a publisher. As mentioned earlier, from overworking, Edward soon loses his eyesight and they are soon turned out to the street. The only shelter they find is at a thief's den in Whitechapel, and Ellen's mother soon dies there in utter poverty.

What Edward criticizes most severely about Christianity is that Christians break family ties and destroy affection. After Edward loses his faith, he struggles for some time to remain a clergyman against his conscience, because he knows that losing his living means parting forever from Margaret. When he finally confesses to the bishop, he, in fact, breaks up with Margaret knowing that her family will not allow the marriage now. Edward's father refuses to acknowledge an infidel as a son, leaving Edward "an OUTCAST; alone and desolate" (134). At the end of the novel, Edward more kindly

remembers his father and admits that “[h]e [his father] acted rightly according to his barbarous Calvinistic creed” since “[i]n his eyes I was a servant of Satan” (254):

[H]e refused me admission to his house, as he believed that God would refuse me admission to heaven when I died. Such is Faith! It is not only opposed to Reason, but to Charity; and with an unnatural piety can tear the fibres of a father’s heart, and leave him wounded to languish and to die. It was the perfection of his belief that led to so much misery. (254)

Edward tries not to be too harsh on his father’s memory, although he appears to have just reasons. The implication is that Christianity so distorts the human mind that it causes people to break all natural familial bonds and to hate others in the name of religion, while those who do not believe in Christianity have the generosity and charity Christianity claims to teach.

Edward happily reunites with Margaret when her father sees that she might die of broken heart if she does not marry Edward. Margaret, however, soon dies in misery because of Edward’s disbelief. When Margaret dies, Edward shouts, “God has murdered her . . . [t]he God who made her, the God whom she loved and faithfully obeyed” (211). He further refers to God as “that monster, that demon, that fiend!” (212). The loss of Margaret seems to be irrevocably complete for Edward because he does not even know where she is buried. She is buried under a false name they carried when Edward was delirious, and he has not been able to remember the name after his recovery.

Derangement scenes do not work miracles in the sick person’s mind in this novel. Ellen, the only living family tie Edward has now, is almost taken away from him when Edward’s father offers to take Ellen on the condition that Edward will completely

relinquish his rights as a father. When Edward's father dies, the family lawyer informs Edward that his father has "spent immense sums in anonymous donations for religious and charitable purposes," yet his generous deeds only highlight his cruel treatment of his son and his family (55).

The Outcast is a record of a person's spiritual journey ending with disbelief in traditional Christianity, yet it does not end there. Edward finds his own religion at the end. At first, when he loses his faith, he decides to read the Bible just for its literary value, but he still believes in the moral power of Christianity. When Margaret dies, Edward curses God and describes Him as a merciless cruel creator. Then later, he thinks that God is "perfectly benevolent, and had made the world as well as he was able; but that his power was contracted and controlled by the evil nature of the material with which he had to deal" (239). In his later years, when he is financially secure and emotionally stabilized, he "began to suspect that our conception of God was entirely erroneous" (240). A book plays a vital role for Edward in finding his religion. He reads Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* and connects what he has read with what he has studied in the natural sciences and reaches a conclusion:

I was taken on to the conclusion that all moral phenomena and events are also subject to fixed and invariable law; that God has no personal relations with the earth; and that his entity or being is higher than a perfect mind, and far beyond human comprehension. But perhaps some clue might be obtained to the intentions of God in regard to ourselves by a careful study of the natural laws which govern the earth, as these laws, which for brevity's sake I shall sometimes call Nature, may fairly be considered the expression of his Will. (242)

Thinking of God as the perfect, retired designer, Edward draws the conclusion that human beings are not meant to be an exception from the natural law and that there is not a vengeful God who watches human suffering and pain with gleeful satisfaction. Men are not better than insects and other living creatures governed by the law:

We are not sent upon the earth to pass through an ordeal, and to be rewarded or punished in another world, after death, according to our actions. We are sent upon the earth for the sake of the earth. In common with the atoms of water and air, we are part of the material with which the Creator, through secondary laws, carries out his scheme, whatever it may be. Those laws are evil and imperfect to us as they are to the insects and the flowers, but they were not arranged for our approval and convenience, and are no doubt perfect as regards the purpose for which they were designed. (244-45)

As Edward is well aware, this theory does not include the belief in the immortality of the soul that Christianity preaches. Although Edward thinks that “[i]t is probable that in death the mind is decomposed (nothing is ever destroyed), and that its elements are recombined into other forms of mental life, so that though the individual intellect perishes, nothing is lost to the race,” his thoughts are far from the traditional Christian belief in heaven and hell (245-46).

One night, Edward goes out and sits “on a cliff overhanging the sea-shore” (246). There he pensively muses on the sad fate of man until he sees a steamer struggling against wind and tide and experiences a moment of epiphany or, rather, “prophecy” as he refers to it (251). Watching the steamer, Edward sees the triumph of art over nature. Man is to God as lower life forms are to man. Although human beings might not have eternal

life at the end of their painful lives, they live like gods in relation to nature, conquering and improving nature:

If we . . . are fellow-slaves with the humblest creatures of the earth, and even with the elements, we are also fellow-workers with God, and assistants of his inscrutable designs. For it is plain that one part of the Divine Scheme is the progress of the earth from a lair of wild beasts and savages to a paradise of happiness and virtue; and that Man has been selected to present the good, to extinguish the evil; . . . to master by the powers of his intellect those laws of which he is now the subject and the slave. (248-49)

Now, Edward feels that “[i]t would be a religious duty to battle with the evil in Nature, and to labour for the glory of the planet” (249). To do so, “[t]he intellect would be carefully trained; idleness and ignorance would be stigmatised as sins” (249). In this new religion, “the hopes of personal immortality” are to be regarded as “selfish craving at variance with the general welfare of the race” (250). The end of the spiritual journey of Edward leads him to think of a relative, hierarchical religion, and with this vision, his long calvary of doubt and search is over: “[N]ever since have I been distressed by the problems of existence” (251).

Edward now wants to preach the gospel of doubt to cure the evils that traditional Christianity has spread:

If I were a young man endowed with literary powers, and about to begin my career, I should adopt as the work of my life the Diffusion of Doubt; for doubt dissipated superstition, and softens the rancour of religious life. Without doubt there can be no tolerance and the history of tolerance is the history of doubt. . . .

[I]n spite of all this progress much religious persecution goes on, and bigotry abounds. The diffusion of Doubt is the only remedy for these evils. (254-56)

Just as the traditional conversion narrative utilized deathbed scenes of good Christian death to prove that Christianity is the only peace-giving, true religion, Edward calmly mentions his death sentence given by many doctors and says his belief in his new religion still sustains him: “Last year, when I was given up by the doctors, and expected to die every hour, I had no desire whatever to begin a new state of existence. . . . It was, I thought, just and natural that I should go back to the Earth whence I came” (259).

From the context the reader does not know if the problem is a temporary one or if Edward is cured of a fatal disease, but it is clear that *The Outcast* utilizes the deathbed trope as a touchstone to prove the true nature of one’s religion. At the end of the spiritual journey, Edward is ready to die a good unbeliever’s death and concludes that “one may cease to believe in a Personal God, and in the Immortality of the Soul, and yet not cease to be a good and even a religious man” (259). Jesus is a great man, and the moral value of Christianity is still valuable. Edward just wants to eliminate mythical elements of the Bible as the disdainful source of bigotry and inhuman doctrines. Like a true disciple, Edward hopefully predicts the diffusion of his religion in the future:

It may be that precisely on account of its [his new religion’s] unselfishness and purity it can make but few converts in the present condition of the human mind; and certainly long ages must elapse before it can become the Religion of the World. But I believe that year by year the power of this religion will increase, and that more and more, as time goes on, it will give rest to troubled hearts, as it did to mine. (260)

On the afterlife Edward assumes an agnostic position, but according to him, doing one's good without anticipating any reward after death is a sublime and unselfish act that will surely take the followers of this new religion to heaven.

As odd as it may sound, these three novels are not the weirdest hybrid examples of the Victorian religious novel. Nor are they the most propagandistic religious novels of Victorian England. When I made my first selection of the novels with as many various subgenres as a novel could have for this section, I found out that they tended to be novels of doubts or novels with unpopular, unconventional religious positions. As seen in *The Nemesis of Faith* and *The Outcast*, when religious novels talk of somewhat unconventional ideas such as the religious skepticism of a clergyman and the creation of a new religion, they tend to rely more heavily on the subgenres to present their religious positions as realistically and plausibly as possible. The more radical or uncommon the religious theme of a novel is, the more it tends to rely on intimate subgenres such as letters, memoirs, manuscripts, or diaries to untangle and follow the development of protagonists' unusual thoughts. In reading these subgenres, on the one hand, readers feel as if they are peeping into the protagonist's unfiltered thoughts and ideas, and the feeling of sharing one's deepest interiority serves to make the story credible and down-to-earth. On the other hand, in case the story of a religious novel deals with the traditional conversion narrative, it does not usually espouse strange narrative devices to tell the story. If a novel professes a more popular religious position such as anti-Catholicism or the traditional conversion narrative, writers of such a novel appear not to feel urges to take on unfamiliar narrative devices to present generally accepted arguments. Frances Trollope does not feel it necessary to adorn her anti-Catholic novel *Father Eustace* with a

heavy load of subgenres. Neither does Eliza Lynn Linton's highly anti-Tractarian novel *Under Which Lord?* have unconventional narrative devices. *The Wife's Trials: a Tale* by Emma Jane Worboise Guyton, a traditional Evangelical conversion narrative, likewise narrates its story in the third-person perspective without too many subgenres. Of course, the third-person narratives of these novels are very frequently interrupted by the direct voice of the authors, but readers are appealed to to agree with narrators-authors, not directly with protagonists-authors. In contrast, Newman's *Loss and Gain* and Francis C. Burnand's *My Time and What I've Done with It*, both of them pro-Catholic works written by Catholic converts, and William Hale White's *The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford*, a book about a dissenting minister, present their stories by relying on intimate subgenres.

Of course, this is a general observation, and I am not arguing that all religious-novel authors followed this practice in professing their religious views. However, it appears that writers of religious novels endeavored to present their stories as realistically as possible, trying to persuade the reader that the stories were "real" and reproducible experiences utilizing both literary and journalistic subgenres. Adding a phrase on the front page that implicitly describes the personal experiences of the author alongside the title of the book is probably one of the devices for realism. Elizabeth Furlong Shipton Harris's *From Oxford to Rome: and How It Fared with Some Who Lately Made the Journey* (1847) gives "by a companion traveler" as the writer. Likewise, Thomas de Longueville's *The Life of a Prig* is signed "by one" instead of with his name. On the title page of Charles Maurice Davies's *Philip Paternoster; A Tractarian Love Story* it says the work is "by an ex-puseyite." Additionally, as seen in *Charles Lever*, "the life of a *Man of the Nineteenth Century*," authors offered their stories as universal experiences (8; italics

in the original). William John Conybeare follows Gresley and Froude in making *Perversion; or, the Cause and Consequences of Infidelity* everybody's experience of the time; under the title, on the front page it says it is "A Tale for the Times," without listing the author's name or anything else. William Sewell's *Hawkstone: A Tale of and for England in 184-*. (1845), also does not have the author's name on the front page—just the subtitle that puts forward the book as a book of the time. Likewise, an anonymous author's *Father Oswald* is subtitled *A Genuine Catholic Story*, Frances Trollope's *Father Eustace*'s subtitle is *A Tale of the Jesuits*, and Grace Kennedy's *Father Clement*'s subtitle is *A Roman Catholic Story*.

What I want to emphasize in this chapter is that in offering their books as realistically and convincingly as possible, writers do rely on the intertextual context of contemporary Victorian religious life, be it from those tracts, newspapers, sermons, or real stories of famous people. As a result, it is almost impossible and useless to take a couple of religious novels and draw a conclusion from them. We need to listen for the hidden intertextual references that should have appeared clear to most Victorian readers because of the repeated appearances they made through various media. Analyzing Bakhtin's concepts, Dallas Liddle argues that the "full implications of his [Bakhtin's] idea that genres themselves are different languages in constant and active mutual interaction, and that this dynamic interaction both determines and constantly modifies the meanings they can convey, has yet to be put to useful work" (7). Victorian religious novels seem to be good sources for studying the interaction of genres. When a story about a doubting clergyman appears in a novel, the reader probably recalls having previously read or heard about many such cases. When a sermon is quoted in a novel, does not

having listened to a similar sermon before reading the novel make the reader take it more seriously? Or, if a reader listens to a similar sermon after reading the novel, does not the reading of the novel affect the listening? How about when a fictional family discussion follows after a sermon, as happens in *Salem Chapel*, and a similar sermon appears later in the novel? Victorians read literary works together, freely sharing their expectations and feelings with their fellow readers, as reflected in Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853). Because we rarely talk about religion in public anymore, we tend to overlook that such was not the case with Victorians. Novels record many cases when a novel, poem, or recent news article was shared by and talked about with family members or friends.

I do believe that there was an active conversation among genres and works that a single author or genre approach cannot wholly grasp. Genres are, after all, artificial scholarly categories invented to label texts, not the actual dividing criteria for the readers, and many texts resist such synthetic categorization. Oral delivery of a sermon, textual presentation of an excerpt of a famous theologian, and in-person offering of a religious message—all should be considered together before we launch a study of an individual religious author or the amorphous genre of the Victorian religious novel. After all, the religious-novel genre is a genre that tells a story about the influence of books, people, sermons, and talks on an individual mind and, as such, cannot be separated from its intertextual contexts. Many religious novels mention other genres of books as critical agents of (de)conversion so as to show other genre's influence on characters' minds. *The Outcast* mentions Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. Likewise, George

Gissing's *Workers in the Dawn* (1880) blames Strauss, Darwin, Schopenhauer, and Comte for deconversion, and Mrs. Humphry Ward's famous eponymous hero Robert Elsmere loses his faith while he reads a fictional work, *Idols of the Place*, written by an atheist named Wendover.

Victorian religious writers must have felt the power of intertextual context in presenting their stories, which can be seen in reading biographies of famous figures in the Victorian world: for example, George MacDonald, a preacher and writer; Kegan Paul, a former preacher who turned into a publisher; and Spurgeon, the famous preacher and tract writer.⁷² Wolff points out that MacDonald "always thought of himself as a preacher" even after he quit his pulpit and became a successful novelist (340). It seems that MacDonald considered his novels textual preaching, delivered in a different medium. The methodological choice between oral and textual delivery has the promise of an interesting topic indeed. What made Kegan Paul find publishing more effective than preaching in delivering his message? And, why did Spurgeon decide to publish his sermons notwithstanding his very successful oral delivery, with five thousand or even eight thousand people ardently listening to him? As religious historians have noted, Spurgeon's use of secular spaces such as Exeter Hall or Surrey Gardens Music Hall for his sermons suggests that he saw his preaching, in part, as a form of entertainment. Thus, his decision to publish his sermons after their delivery can be read as an endeavor to make his audience digest his messages in private, in a less crowded space. Having a written theological text that the reader can read over and over and share with others could affect his or her reading of a novel of a similar theme later. The work or discussion on a

⁷² For Kegan Paul's transformation from a clergyman to a publisher and his deconversion, read Howsam, especially chapter 2.

religious theme a reader previously encountered predisposes his or her mind toward a book on the same theme.

While studying the panoramic landscape of the Victorian religious world and looking at the Victorian religious novel genre with both a macro- and microperspective is impossible within the scope of the present work, I ask these questions for future scholars of religious novels. I hope the macroperspective of this chapter leads Victorian scholarship to refine the holistic reading method, a way, after all, we read the various texts in our world. Most religious novels have disappeared, perhaps happily for the reader, but that does not mean we need to lose the multilayered, diverse generic melting pot of Victorian society.⁷³ In the next chapters, I suggest looking at many repeated themes in the Victorian religious-novel genre, such as confession and conversion, and the distinct characteristics of the genre. Religious novels are, after all, deeply propagandistic with a mission to attract more converts to the religious positions of their authors. The following two chapters will analyze what kind of strategies the religious-novel genre takes to reach readers and move their minds.

⁷³ I am not arguing that hybridity in form was an exclusive practice for the Victorian religious-novel genre. Other canonical Victorian writers such as Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, and Charles Dickens practiced hybridity in their literary works as the recent *Victorian Hybridities: Cultural Anxiety and Formal Innovation* shows. I strongly believe that many other writers did the same thing. Rather, I want to draw scholars' attention to a largely forgotten archive of hybridity in this project.

Chapter 3

The Conversion Narrative of the Victorian Religious Novel:

“Was Blind, but Now I See”

The apostle Paul’s epiphany on the road to Damascus, arguably the world’s most famous moment of conversion, provides us with a good model for understanding the traditional rhetoric of the conversion narrative:

I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city* in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God. . . .

And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

And one Ananias . . . [c]ame unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee . . . For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22.3-16; italics in the original)⁷⁴

Massimo Leone asserts that “Saint Paul is a constant and fundamental term of comparison for converted people, both in Catholicism and Protestantism” (5), and William Clements goes so far as to call Paul’s story a “prototype” for conversion (108). This ur-conversion narrative begins not with the moment of realization but with the establishment of a former life. Structurally, the traditional conversion narrative consists of three stages: preconversion life, a moment of divine intervention, and postconversion life. In that the conversion narrative looks back from the moment of conversion and ends with a glimpse of the future in order to validate the transformation, it is much like

⁷⁴ All quotations of the Bible are from *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (AV). Although Paul’s conversion is told three times in Acts, this passage is the first one in the first-person perspective. Before this narrative, the conversion story of Paul is recorded in the third-person perspective in Acts 9.1-22. A shortened version of this narrative also appears a couple of chapters later in Acts 26.12-18.

autobiography. In explaining autobiography, Janet Varner Gunn notices that “it is toward the future that the act of autobiography heuristically points. It is in the future that reality stands waiting to be *realized*; it is from the future that time comes. . . . Autobiography’s arc of meaning projects forward where that meaning can be realized (18; italics in the original). Likewise, while the conversion moment and preconversion life occupy most of the narrative, the rhetorical emphasis unmistakably lies in the future mission or changed life of the converted. Frank K. Flinn draws our attention to the fact that “Paul himself never refers to himself as one converted but as one called”; Flinn’s keen observation helps us to read divine intervention and preconversion life as prologues per se to the yet-to-be-lived life of the converted (52). This prologue is a point of departure and it sets up a dramatic turning point—a clear-cut distinction between the preconversion and the postconversion self. The Latin root of the word “conversion” means to “turn around” or “transform,” and Paul’s conversion narrative is true to the original definition of the word. After conversion, Paul changes his name from Saul to Paul and his mission from persecution of the followers of Jesus to the conversion of Gentiles and Jews to Christianity. At the same time, Paul’s story claims that the new-birth experience resulted from divine intervention and not from an individual search for truth or spiritual meditation. Thus, personal details such as spiritual background and social context are not elaborated on in the biblical Pauline narrative.

In another familiar conversion narrative of the eighteenth century, “Hymn 41,” widely known as “Amazing Grace,” John Newton lyricizes his conversion experience. Born in London in 1725, Newton was a sailor involved in the slave trade and he himself experienced hardship as a slave in West Africa for some years. Rescued by a captain sent

by his father in 1748, Newton experienced his first spiritual conversion when the ship sailed into a violent storm on the way home from West Africa. He later became an Anglican clergyman, in 1764, and served as curate of Olney, Buckinghamshire, where he wrote hymns with William Cowper. The first edition of their collaboration, *Olney Hymns*, came out in 1779. “Amazing Grace” is the best known hymns from that collection:

Amazing Grace! (how sweet the sound!)

That sav'd a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

.....

Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares,

I have already come;

'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

.....

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,

And mortal life shall cease,

I shall possess, within the veil,

A life of joy and peace. (43)⁷⁵

With its highly figurative language and focus on psychological experience, Newton's hymn of 1772 might appear to be quite different from Paul's verses at first glance.

However, regardless of their generic differences, as conversion narratives they share their

⁷⁵ Out of this six-stanza hymn, I quote the first, third, and fifth stanzas. The hymn was written in 1772 for the New Year's Day sermon of 1773 and published in 1779.

triumvirate structure, their rhetoric, and their insistence on the genuine nature of the transformation. Conversion experiences are in both cases depicted as the genuine transformation of the inner self, as “the conversion of the heart” (Hindmarsh 32). “Amazing Grace” argues for the genuineness of Newton’s transformation by contrasting Newton’s preconversion mentality with his postconversion spiritual interiority. Echoing Paul’s conversion narrative, Newton asserts that “now [he] “see[s],” and in the fourth stanza he claims that the grace he found would stay with him “as long as life endures” (43). The use of the continual present tense asserts that Newton’s spiritual blindness is cured for good. The genuineness of Newton’s conversion seems to be also confirmed by his serving as a clergyman after the conversion experience. Likewise, the background from which Paul’s narrative emerges gives an implicit affirmation of the sincerity of Paul’s conversion. Paul’s narrative is offered while he is persecuted for converting Gentiles, and that he still pursues his new life’s mission testifies to the genuine nature of his conversion. The narrative of one’s spiritual interiority affirms that the preconversion self is permanently transformed. What is quite intriguing is that both narratives argue for the validity of radical, or sudden, conversion.⁷⁶ This radical model of conversion has, indeed, set a model for future writers of conversion narratives after the Pauline model of radical conversion is adopted by and promulgated through *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, which “has had an enormous influence on the writing of autobiography in both its explicitly religious forms and its secular varieties” (Barbour 10).⁷⁷ More importantly, Augustine’s use of the words “convert” and “conversion” strictly sticks to

⁷⁶ This model of equating sudden conversion to genuine conversion had significant impacts on the tradition of the conversion narrative. Gradual conversion has begun to receive its due attention only recently, thanks to sociologists.

⁷⁷ In order to see the similarity between the Pauline model and that of Augustine, see Augustine’s conversion scene in the garden in book 8 in *The Confessions*.

this Pauline interpretation of the words, that divine intervention initiates the process of conversion and not vice versa (Morrison viii).⁷⁸

These two traditional conversion narratives show that writing or telling the conversion narrative inevitably involves the self-editing process. Clements argues that “[w]hen a storyteller characterizes himself as narrator, he may draw upon his honest recollections of the experience recounted. But his recollection will arise, in part, out of the expectations engendered by patterns conventional for the nature of the story he tells” (110). In order to present the postconversion self as completely different from the preconversion self, Newton chooses to depict his preconversion and postconversion life by using a series of binaries: lost/found and blind/see. In Paul’s narrative, too, only parts of the previous life that can highlight postconversion transformation appear in the narrative. Paul confesses that he has mercilessly persecuted the followers of Jesus until the moment of conversion. His outwardly casual introduction of himself, that he was born in Tarsus and educated under the guidance of Gamaliel, is mentioned to reveal what a politically and religiously powerful person he was. Tarsus was a capital of the Roman province of Cilicia, and its citizens enjoyed Roman citizenship, a great privilege at that time. Gamaliel was one of the leading authorities and renowned scholars of Jerusalem, and Paul states that he was “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers.” His political connection must have been good, too, since on his journey to Damascus he carried letters written by “the high priest . . . and all the estate of the

⁷⁸ On the same page, Karl F. Morrison points out that, “taken as a whole, Augustine’s sparing uses of the verb *convert* and the noun *conversion* denote a sequence of action and response: an act of grace (the turning of God toward a person) and the answering turn of that person toward God” and “[f]rom the beginning of the *Confessions* to the end, Augustine consistently taught that God’s ‘conversion’ toward the soul was the precondition of the soul’s ‘conversion’ toward him” (italics in the original).

elders.” This given information implies that he valued his postconversion life more and that there was an unbridgeable gap between his preconversion and postconversion self.

In his study of the conversion narrative of the Bible, Scot McKnight points out that “[w]hile they [evangelists] tell us . . . about conversion, they don’t hone in on the more fundamental details because that was not part of their purpose” (47). The purpose of the conversion narrative is to give a testimony of self-transformation and, eventually, persuade others to follow the given example. Individual details that do not help to highlight transformation, not to mention spiritual background and social context, are not mentioned either in “Amazing Grace” or in Paul’s story. The traditional conversion narrative enables an individual to simplify one’s historical life and focus on his or her spiritual life to assert his or her new inner self.

The outcome of the editing process in the conversion narrative highlights the newness of the converted self, the new self’s individual and spiritual reality, rather than the new self’s relation to his or her world. But the strong emphasis on the self in the conversion narrative should not hinder us from looking at its communal possibilities. Seen as a turning point, conversion inevitably involves the question of “toward what” as well as “from where” because “[c]onversion is not just a personal spiritual awakening, it is also an entry into a particular religious community” (Bryant and Lamb 12). Historically, the original function of the conversion narrative was to allow the convert to enter into his or her newly chosen religious community; arguably, the self-editing process was involved to incorporate communal identity. Indeed, this communal aspect of the conversion narrative has manifested itself from the beginning of the tradition, in the Pauline model. Paul’s conversion narrative is, after all, offered as a defense when some Jews accuse him

of betraying Jewish tradition: “This is the man that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place” (Acts 21.28; italics in the original). In other words, one of the conversion narrative’s purposes is to allow the newly converted person to belong to a religious community of his or her choice. Britain was not an exception, as we notice from D. Bruce Hindmarsh’s study. In his study of the Evangelical conversion narratives from early modern England, Hindmarsh states that “[a]lmost all these narratives were written to fulfil the requirement that candidates for admission to the church had to offer not only a profession of orthodox belief but also evidence of personal saving faith” (46). In the Puritan gathered churches, conversion narratives qualified individuals for church membership, so “the formal conversion ‘relation,’ that is, a testimony of personal religious experience,” should be “spoken or read to the entire congregation . . . before admission as evidence of the applicant’s visible sainthood” (Caldwell 1).⁷⁹ By requiring conversion narratives from the newly converted individuals, each denomination could have an optimal chance to (re)educate these candidates about its doctrines and religious practices. On the other hand, by writing these narratives, candidates could show how well they internalized the religious teachings of their chosen denominations. Therefore, the final version of the conversion narrative is the outcome of

⁷⁹ Supporters of the notion of a gathered church, such as the Congregational and Baptist Churches, argued that each person should be able to choose his or her church according to his or her religious beliefs. According to them, a national church’s compulsory membership weakened not only the church’s spiritual authority but also individual’s faith by assuming that “a person belonged to a certain church merely because he or she happened to live in a geographical area it had claimed as its sphere” (Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality* 88). By contrast, a gathered church accepted a new comer only when the new person voluntarily expressed his or her desire to join the church. Supporters of gathered churches also advocated the autonomy of individual church (“the affairs of churches” should be “decided by their members and not by the state”) (Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality* 123).

the reciprocal understanding between the candidate and his or her chosen denomination.⁸⁰

Whether or not there are official “gatekeepers” who formally grant admission to people who wish to be members of their chosen denominations, the fact remains the same: the converted person expresses his or her new religious identity through adapting the language and rhetoric of the new affiliation and conforming to the doctrine of the new religious community (Bryant and Lamb 7). In the past when institutionalized religion wielded such a strong power over individuals’ lives, churches could decide whom to accept into their communities. Now, in our world where “[t]he ‘supermarket’ or ‘pick and mix’ approach to religion” becomes an increasingly prevalent phenomenon, the convert appears to have more freedom to decide with what language and rhetoric he or she should express spiritual identities (Bryant and Lamb 9).

Although recent scholars of conversion tend to focus on either the personal or the communal aspect of the conversion experience, it is important to realize that these two aspects of conversion are both crucial.⁸¹ In Britain, from as early as the British Reformation, conversion seemed to be understood, on both the personal and communal levels, “as a matter of true belief and allegiance to the true institutional church, whether that be the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England” and “as a matter of inward faith and personal salvation” (Hindmarsh 31). In early modern England, the politico-

⁸⁰ Hence, Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier assert, “Conversion highlights the interaction, and in many cases the tension, between individual consciousness and the structural requirements of community life” (Buckser and Glazier xii).

⁸¹ Most scholars focus on the personal and spiritual aspect of the conversion experience. In rare cases, scholars like Gauri Viswanathan draw our attention to the communal aspect, but Viswanathan’s reading of conversion as a political event tends to preclude the reader from looking at the personal and spiritual aspect at the same time. Only recently, sociological approach to conversion has begun to study the conversion experience in a more balanced way: “[T]he converting person or group begins to employ the specific rhetoric of the religious group, thereby incorporating into their lifeways the language of transformation inherent to the particular group. The religious terminology serves as a new interpretative system that has the potential to dramatically transform the worldview of the converting person. For instance, Christians utilize terms such as ‘sinner,’ ‘heaven’ and ‘hell’; Buddhists ‘*samsara*,’ ‘*dhamma*,’ and ‘*Nirvana*’; and Muslims ‘*shirk*,’ ‘*sharia*,’ and ‘*jihad*’” (Rambo and Farhadian 30; italics in the original).

ecclesiastical nature of the Anglican Church made people keenly aware of their choice of institutions, although the logic of “the conversion of the heart” was repeatedly emphasized to proselytes (Hindmarsh 32). Both Catholic priests and Puritans of the Reformation era urged individuals to gain an inner conviction of grace, to continuously examine their interiority to reach genuine conversion.⁸² The practice of conversion, in this sense, created a negotiating space for the candidate to negotiate his or her individual and communal identity, as seen in chapter 1, especially in cases of Jews and Catholics, although it became harder for the racial or religious “others” to obtain communal identity with conversion as nationalist discourse prevailed over the discussion of conversion in the nineteenth century.

The brief survey of the rhetoric of conversion in chapter 1 illustrates the tradition of conversion narrative inherited by the Victorians. My focus is, of course, on how this master narrative of conversion was adapted by the VRN, which necessitates a shift from the way conversion is represented by the covert to the way conversion is imagined by the reading public. The notion of conversion and the conversion narrative as a narrative frame and trope became unprecedentedly popular in the Victorian period. While looking at the conversion narrative in the VRN in the context of the nineteenth century’s interest in nationalism and individualism, I argue that the adaptation of the conversion narrative in the Victorian religious novel brings forth significant narratological revisions. The principal revision results from the difference between “real life” conversion narratives and fictional ones: in the VRN, the conversion narrative becomes not a self-

⁸² The logic of “the conversion of the heart” became widely spread by the seventeenth century and helped sustain the popularity of the conversion narrative. Of course, methodological guidelines on spiritual self-examination were provided by each institution, and an individual’s conversion narrative inevitably reflected the language of his or her chosen denomination.

representation by a real person who actually undergoes the process of conversion but a narrative about an imagined person's life story that includes conversion, sometimes causing the perspective of the conversion narrative to shift from the first person to the third person. Appearing within the novel genre, the conversion narrative comes to represent conversion as a lifetime process in progress, which has a huge impact on the convert's life and on the community to which he or she belongs. This change, I believe, originated from the Victorians' deep anxiety over false conversion in a society where conversion literally meant political privilege. In *Margaret Percival: The Experience of Life*, Elizabeth Missing Sewell concisely summarizes the sentiment beneath the depiction of conversion as progress: "Now no reason can force us to give full credence to wonderful stories of sudden conversions, to a great extent, because we know that the fact of their being sincere is only to be proved by time and careful inquiries" (1: 410-11). Earlier conversion narratives such as *The Confessions* by Augustine and *The Pilgrim's Progress, from This World to That Which is to Come* by John Bunyan do not present conversion as a realistic lifelong progress. Retrospectively written in the first person, Augustine's life story in *The Confessions* ends at the moment of his conversion, and after that Augustine turns to his reflections on Genesis; *The Pilgrim's Progress* is a Christian allegory.

Yet another revision of the fictionalized conversion narrative is that the depiction of the moment of conversion to a great extent disappears from the page. Conversion sometimes happens offstage, or the narrative briefly informs the reader of the conversion of the protagonist, and moves on. Instead of asserting the validity of conversion by elaborating on the moment of conversion, the fictionalized conversion narrative tends to

rely on an association with the marriage plot. Additionally, if the reader of the traditional conversion narrative discovered what would come in the narrative by reading the proclamation on the first page concerning the sinfulness of the preconversion self, the Victorian novel reader was given other indicators of the conversion such as derangement scenes, typical religious figures such as priests and High Churchmen, and precocious and sensitive protagonists.

The first section of this chapter, “Confession/Testimony,” looks at the power dynamics of confessional acts in Victorian novels and at how these acts take different forms depending on that dynamic. It is in this section that I make a distinction between novels of confession and novels of testimony. Section 2, “Dreamland,” focuses on the indicators of conversion, such as deathbed scenes, mysterious prophecies, and derangement scenes.⁸³ Because of anxiety over false conversion, the Victorian conversion narrative increasingly seeks ways to present conversions as genuine. Earning converts becomes one of the ways and providing deathbed conversion scenes is another. Section 3, “Many Silences,” focuses on the moment of conversion within the Victorian novel.⁸⁴ This section looks at the stage model of conversion to argue that the first and third stages are emphasized in the VRN, and not the moment of conversion itself. Conversion becomes a lifetime process, prompting a series of narrative innovations. Instead of a detailed emotional and physiological description at the moment of conversion, the VRN adapted

⁸³ “Dreamland” is the title of chapter 36 in Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet* (337).

⁸⁴ According to Michel Foucault, “Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27).

the popular marriage plot to endorse or express disapproval of a particular conversion. The marriage plot serves, for many of these novels, in place of detailed theological arguments as a way of producing and embodying conversion. My final section, “The Three Happiest Years of My Life,” looks at the way the conversion narrative is adapted in developing the marriage plot (Brontë, *Villette* 614).⁸⁵ For this I do a sustained reading of Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), and I argue that not only can *Villette* be read as a religious novel but it also takes the conversion plot out of its purely religious context and uses it to describe the dynamics of the novel’s central romantic relationship. While the traditional VRN speaks through the language of romance to approve or condemn a protagonist’s spiritual journey, *Villette* speaks through the language of conversion narrative to discuss the courtship plot. In other words, while many religious novels sanction the religious position of the protagonist by inducing his or her lover to see the validity of that position and by ending the story with a happy marriage, *Villette* takes an unexpected turn in the conventional religious plot by transferring the religion the heroine, Lucy Snowe, refuses in the conversion narrative to her lover, making him a personification of the church Lucy rejects. The novel cleverly conflates the marriage plot with the religious plot and the individual religious identity with the national identity.

Confession/Testimony

With these historical and religious contexts in mind, let us now look at the way the VRN incorporated the conversion narrative. After all, most religious novels are propagandistic, presumably written to convert the reader to the writers’ religious positions, and fictionalized conversion narratives serve to clarify what these authors

⁸⁵ Instead of “Brontë, *Villette*,” only “*Villette*” will be given when I quote from this novel.

believe to be true/false conversion. In this sense, I argue that the account of conversion in the VRN functions as a spiritual testimony rather than as a confessional act. Scholars of the confessional genre have treated confessional writings and conversion narratives in the same way. In contrast, I argue that, while the appearance of the conversion narrative within confessional autobiography easily misleads us to confuse the genre of confession and the genre of testimony, we need to study them separately.

Peter van der Veer argues that “[s]incerity of conversion is not only an interior state but is located precisely in a performative act of communicating to others that one’s sincerity is anchored in an interior state of self-questioning and self-accounting” (11). In other words, the act of writing or telling that one is sincere in his or her conversion is a way to confirm sincerity in the conversion narrative, as if the convert is justified by his or her speech act. While the readers of the religious novels are sometimes given chances to decide if the fictionalized conversion is a desired one or not in the course of novel, in real life, the sincerity of conversion is rarely questioned since spiritual testimonies, by their very interiority, are unverifiable.⁸⁶ It is not the reader or listener that judges one’s sincerity; the act itself testifies to it. Even if Victorians suspected that a given conversion was false, if the recently converted person told or wrote that he or she truly experienced conversion, what could be said to contradict the given statement? The open declaration might deepen suspicion. But if people were not going to directly challenge the statement as a lie by gathering circumstantial evidence, there seemed no other way than to accept the given testimony as was. I argue that we need to read the conversion narrative as well

⁸⁶ In some rare cases, if a novel makes fun of the sincerity of the newly converted person, the conversion gets satirical treatment in the novel. See, for example, Ethelbert Stanhope’s conversion to Judaism in *Barchester Towers* by Anthony Trollope, and see also the protagonist’s in *The Life of a Prig* by Thomas de Longueville (1885).

as the fictionalized versions of it as testimonies rather than as confessions. In her article “Cultures of Confession/Cultures of Testimony: Turning the Subject inside out” in *Modern Confessional Writing*, Susannah Radstone states that “though both confession and witness testimony have long histories, the contemporary proliferation of testimonial discourses *and* of writing and criticism on testimony suggest that discourses of testimonial witness may now be superseding confession’s dominance in literature and other media” (167; italics in the original). I argue that testimony’s supersession of confession should be traced back to the Victorian religious novel and the testimony genre should receive its due attention from scholars.

The confusion about the generic differences between confession and testimony started when the conversion narrative was adopted in autobiographies. As mentioned above, the conversion narrative’s emphasis on inner truth helped popularize the genre. Hindmarsh states that “[i]t was this concept of inward conversion . . . that provided the theological framework for the emergence of conversion narrative as a truly popular genre” (32). The conversion narrative’s strong emphasis on one’s spiritual interiority allowed the genre to be easily adapted in spiritual autobiographies for “[c]onversion . . . is able to confer structure and intelligibility upon the narrative of a life” (Riley 1). In describing the self’s spiritual, intellectual, or ideological developments retrospectively, autobiographers welcomingly borrowed the structure and rhetoric of the conversion narrative, the narrative of transformation. The conversion narrative allowed autobiographers to recite seemingly inconsistent features of the self in the scope of a narrative. On the other hand, conversion in an autobiography disrupted the autobiographer’s project toward coherent selfhood. If the conversion moment signaled a radical departure from the preconversion

self, its presence within autobiography served to divide the self. Conversion in autobiography was a “fulcrum . . . a pivot on which . . . the momentum of life shift[ed], a turning point, a knife-edge bisecting an identity and its story” (Riley 6). There remained, therefore, the project of combining the preconversion self with the postconversion self to maintain “a unity of subjectivity” in autobiography (Peters 12). “[T]he psychological need or the social imperative to understand oneself as a totality,” which lay at the bottom of the autobiographical project, was utterly thwarted because “[c]onversion [became] a potentially endless gamut of knife edges that threaten to tear the fabric of identity.” (Peters 11-12; Riley 6). Because of the peculiar generic characteristics of autobiography, the tension between the preconversion and the postconversion self and any prospect to resolve the tension increasingly became the focus of the narrative.

I argue that testimony as a narrative form has been regrettably overlooked because scholars of the confessional genre are preoccupied with the power dynamic in confession and the tension between the preconversion and postconversion self in confessional narratives. In the secular version of the conversion narrative in autobiographies, it is important to remember that the autobiography writers borrow the frame of the conversion narrative to explain dramatic changes in their lives, but they very often present their autobiographies in the tradition of religious testimony rather than of confession.

“Confession” in a narrower sense means what a person reveals in the space of a confessional. In the Catholic tradition, the practice of auricular confession is codified with the decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which insisted that “[a]ll believers of both sexes who have attained the age of discretion must faithfully confess their sins in person at least once a year to their own priest, and must make the effort to carry out the

imposed penance according to their ability” (quoted in Bilinkoff 2). From the beginning of the tradition, then, the idea of confession is closely related to the notion of sin and penance. It implies that a confessant admits that he or she has done something wrong or, rather, something that society would not tolerate, as Susan Bernstein aptly points out. In her study of “confessional” novels, Bernstein argues that while female confessants expose wrongdoings done against them, the act of confession features women as transgressors. Traditionally, confession is believed to be essential for spiritual health and, as Peter Brooks notes, the implication behind this belief that “a purgation through articulation and penitence” is necessary is that “there is impurity to be purged, a state of soul-sickness needing cure” (73). Confession in this sense is “contrary to the basic human will to self-preservation, and hence evidence of a sick soul, bent on self-destruction” (72).

In contrast, testimony has nothing to do with this self-destructive drive. As Radstone demonstrates, the differences between confession and testimony become straightforward if we think about them in legal language:

[T]hough there may be shifts between confession and witness testimony in a court statement or a work of literature, or a television programme, for instance, the two modes of discourse are nevertheless discrete: in confession it is the self that is scrutinised and implicated—the self that is the subject and object of confession.

Witness testimony’s object, on the other hand, is always an event or an other that is external to the witness. . . . In testimony the subject is no longer in struggle with itself, but constitutes itself as innocent or “done to” in relation to implicated other/s or events. In literary confession it is the subject’s *own* violence or

sexuality that troubles the narrator. In witness testimony it is the violence or sexuality of another, or the shock of an event, that disturbs the witness. (169-70)

Testimony is a form of public declaration of what has happened to the speaker, and it usually does not invite the audience to judge the testimony giver. Radstone points out that “the witness may describe something that has happened to them—an attack, for instance, but for which they are held to have no responsibility or agency. Witness testimony may concern an act perpetrated upon or against the witness, or it may simply concern an event at which the witness has been present” (168). If testimony implies the lack of agency, it does not mean that the witness has lost it through his or her guilty acts as the confessional subject has.⁸⁷

In religious testimonies “sinful” acts might be stated, but they do not guarantee the audience/the reader any power to denounce the “sinners” because past sinfulness has already been washed away. Individuals who give testimony present their stories as proof of God’s grace or, rather, a god’s grace, witnessed by themselves. For them, the meaning of the past events has already been clearly revealed and understood. Each of them has made a clean breast of his or her past acts. Forgiven, they are better off in their spiritual lives than the audience and, thus, beyond the audience’s judgmental power. More importantly, testimony does not concern itself with presenting a consistent self throughout the narrative. If there is inconsistency in the preconversion and the postconversion self, it is the result of divine intervention, not of one’s actions. Total transformation testifies to divine grace, and, even if the audience or the reader refuses to believe the given testimony, his or her decisions do not affect the identity of the witness.

⁸⁷ As Brooks explains, “[C]onfession most often is produced from a state of dependency and abjection rather than from one of autonomy and dignity” (72).

While reading autobiography as a conversion narrative, scholars such as Oliver S. Buckton, James O'Rourke, Patrick Riley, and Gerald Peters have tended to take it for granted that all autobiographies are confessions, not testimonies. When Riley asserts that "[t]he history of autobiography, from its origins to contemporary times, bears witness to the abiding influence of the *structure* and the *rhetoric* of conversion," he equates talking about one's conversion experience to giving confession, admission of one's guilt in public to get absolution (1; italics in the original). Yet, the scholars' analysis of autobiography with conversional structure reveals that the autobiography follows the tradition of testimony rather than of confession, especially in relation to the reader. In reading Wordsworth's *Prelude* as "a secular version of the spiritual autobiography," James O'Rourke argues that "[i]n its indifference to the availability of public meaning of its gnomic allusions, the poem is also, Iago-like, beyond caring how a reader might 'judge, punish, forgive, console, [or] reconcile' its hermetic, Olympian author" (65, 76). Peters's study of the relationship between the author and the reader of autobiography also shows that the autobiography is given not as confession but rather as testimony: "This is the root of the modern autobiographical impulse—to confess not in order to be forgiven by another but to construct a confession in such a way that one is oneself the creator and author of one's own absolving authority" (60-61). The author does not rely on the reader to gain his new identity; rather, the audience is there to witness his or her declaration of the new self.

It is when the conversion narrative appears within the novel, I argue, that the typical characteristics of both confession and testimony intertwine within a narrative. The "confession" given in the religious novel cannot be explained by the traditional

understanding of confession. When the conversion narrative is adopted within the Victorian religious novel, I argue, it becomes what I call confessional testimony. Of course, being confession, it often involves admission of one's transgressions, but being testimony, it is also a declaration or revelation of one's deeds that overflows out of a tormented mind, and the person who confesses does not necessarily agree that what he or she has done is a sin. Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner argue that confession in the nineteenth century is "a public restatement of social order, of the normality of the criminal" (7). Buckton also argues that the starting point of confession is admission of sin and guilt, exposing the self's secret to the reader. In the matrix of fictionalized confession, the relationship between the reader and the audience is more dynamic and sometimes quite intriguingly confusing; there is usually a confessor of the verbal or textual confession in a novel, who tends to take the confession in the novel in a traditional way. At the same time, the reader is yet another confessor, who sometimes knows more than the textual confessor and, thus, has more power.⁸⁸ While confessing, confessants appear to lack any agency. As Foucault and Bernstein argue, confession is a power game in which power is centered on confessors who have the authority to make judgments. The revealed secrets of the confessant give the reader the power of a confessor who has authority to absolve, "without whose presence the confession would not achieve legitimacy or resolution" (Buckton 9). As Terrence Doody points out, "By confessing, he [the confessant] accepts the civil or social norms that identify him as a criminal; for whatever reason, he wants to move back into the legal community and, therefore, accepts its right to censure him" (7). In contrast to the traditional confession, I argue that the confessional testimony giver in the novel attempts to make changes in the

⁸⁸ Thus, by allowing the reader to make a judgment, a religious novel directly engages the reader.

cultural understanding of the deeds recalled in the “confession,” instead of accepting the confessor’s judgment, and, in the long run, does help to introduce such changes.⁸⁹ The speech act in the confessional testimony provides the speaker with a chance to defend his or her actions, the justification by speech.

There are other significant revisions confessional testimony brings to the religious novel. With the conversion narrative as an event that possibly severs the preconversion narrative from the postconversion narrative, the concern of the religious novel lies in maintaining narratological unity, rather than the unity of the self. The confessant’s secret, or rather silence, often creates narratological force and propels stories on. In *Ellen Middleton, A Tale* by Lady Georgiana Fullerton, for example, it is the eponymous heroine’s silence about her past sin that creates the whole plot of the novel. Again, in *The Silence of Dean Maitland* by Maxwell Grey, Cyril Maitland’s father prevents Cyril’s attempted confession to his father and says, “I insist upon your silence” (81). His efficient command functions to prevent the novel from reaching its premature ending. Additionally, rather than describing in detail the moment of a life turning point, the conversion narrative stretches out through the novel, increasingly emphasizing that conversion is a process rather than a moment. Lewis R. Rambo’s study of religious conversion emphasizes that “conversion is a process, not a specific event” (Rambo 7). Victorian religious novels seem to argue the same thing by emphasizing cultural, social, personal, and religious systems, the four components of conversion, according to Rambo.

⁸⁹ My understanding of confession in Victorian religious novel and its function in the Victorian culture are similar to Jeffrey J. Kripal’s in his statement offered in the introduction to *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*: “In more provocative terms, far from speaking secrets to amend some past sin against God or tradition, it seems more likely that I feel compelled to study and speak secrets in order to address the sins God (or whom we imagine to be God, anyway) and our traditions have committed against us” (Kripal xv).

“Dreamland”

Testimony as a genre refuses to put its sincerity in question. After all, if a testimony is usually written or given right after conversion, it is hard to decide if it will last. In novels the reader often gets to know what happens to a testimony giver after the conversion moment. Victorian novels were full of clues that indicated how stories would develop. Then, what were some stereotypical indicators for genuine conversion in the Victorian religious novel? Winning others over to the convert's newly chosen affiliation came to stand for a criterion of true conversion. As Michael Ragussis states, “[T]he conversion of the Other (heathen, infidel, or Jew) is the surest sign of the conversion of the self, so that the true convert proves himself by becoming a proselytizer” (2). Another popular way to judge the reality of conversion came from deathbed scenes. Conversion undergone at the deathbed was understood to be irrevocable, as if death sealed the act of conversion. If witnessed by family members, as Miriam Elizabeth Burstein asserts, the deathbed scenes in anti-Semitic novels also functioned to reunite the broken family together in the same religious tradition (340). Along with deathbed conversion, where a future convert witnesses the death of his or her close friend or family member, a near-death experience of the candidate became a very popular way to precede the conversion moment, working as an “[i]nternal catalyst” for conversion (Rambo and Farhadian 26).⁹⁰ This section reads conversion cases from deathbed scenes and near-death experiences in some VRNs in relation to family ideology.⁹¹ Yet, instead of separating these moments

⁹⁰ Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian state that “[i]nternal catalysts for conversion may include mystical or near-death experiences, illness, existential questions about the purpose of life, desire for transcendence, altered states of consciousness, pathology, or apostasy” (26).

⁹¹ The novels are William John Conybeare, *Perversion: or, The Causes and Consequences of Infidelity*; Sarah Smith's (Hesba Stretton) *Jessica's First Prayer*; and Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*.

from the contexts and providing psychological interpretation of these scenes as scholars such as Ragussis and Burstein do, I suggest a sociological approach similar to that of Rambo, Charles Farhadian and Frank Finn because it helps us to have a comprehensive understanding of conversion, of both its spiritual and communal aspects.⁹²

Rambo criticizes the misleading implication the traditional Pauline model of conversion conveys to us.⁹³ According to him, “contrary to popular mythology, conversion is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever” (1). While he does not wish to exclude the possibility of sudden conversion, he asks us to think about conversion as a process rather than as an event. The model he proposes consists of seven stages: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. Having provided this stage model, he cautiously states that it is not intended to suggest that the conversion process happens unilinearly. Any of these stages can precede others, and a person can experience multiple stages at the same time or move back and forth among them. If we apply this sociological model of conversion to our reading of the deathbed and near-death conversion experiences in the VRN, we can see the way the VRN embraces the conversion narrative. Ragussis and Burstein provide us with an insightful analysis of the deathbed conversion scenes. A dying Christian convert helps the writer to “illustrate the fortitude and peace with which the Christian dies,” and his or her death catalyzes conversion of his or her family

⁹² According to Bryant and Lamb, after William James’s influential study on religious conversion, “the psychological approach to conversion has remained central to the study of conversion through most of the twentieth century.” Having said that, they point out that, “more recent studies of the phenomenon [of conversion] have regarded it in more sociological terms” (2).

⁹³ Later, when he collaborated with Farhadian in 1999, Rambo suggested using the term “converting” instead of “conversion”: “[C]onverting’ is the most appropriate term to signify that religious change is an ongoing complex process involving many different dimensions” (23). But I use “conversion,” the term Rambo initially used in his pioneering sociological study of conversion, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, throughout this chapter.

members, especially of parents (Ragussis 37). However, the dying convert in anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic religious novels is very frequently female and the person who watches over her in her deathbed, and thus the soon-to-be convert, is usually her father. Accordingly, the death of the heroine in these novels functions to resolve the tension between her God-given authority (not hers originally) and the paternal authority. Additionally, the deathbed scenes make the dying females sexless, spiritual symbols. These intriguing interpretations provide us with insightful analyses with which we can see through Victorian cultural assumptions. And this chapter, of course, does not argue against these interpretations. Rather, I suggest placing the scenes within the conversion narrative of the Victorian religious tradition and reading them in their fictionalized context by taking a sociological approach to conversion.

In the sense that persuading the reader to accept the writer's religious position is one of the main reasons for writing these religious novels, the conversion moment is the climax of these religious novels. Applying the sociological approach to conversion in reading the conversion scenes in a sick room, I would like to ask the following questions: In what part of the novel are the deathbed scenes or near-death experiences placed? What kinds of preparations are made in the plot to highlight the moment? What kinds of cultural assumptions are utilized to make deathbed scenes and near-death experiences optimal occasions for conversion? What can we learn about Victorian culture as a result? To gain a comprehensive understanding of cultural assumptions, I suggest paying more attention to what individual authors' attitudes toward certain notions reveal to us, rather than how their predisposed notions were manifested in the novel. For example, in the sustained reading of *Alton Locke*, rather than pointing out examples from the novel of

Charles Kingsley's notion of muscular Christianity, I endeavor to show how Kingsley delivers his message of muscular Christianity.

According to Rambo and Farhadian, context is "the overall environment in which [religious] change takes place" (23). Macrocontext "includes such large-scale domains as political systems, religious organizations, multinational corporations, relevant ecological considerations and economic systems," and the "microcontext focuses upon the more personal world of the individual, such as family and friends, vocation, and other aspects of a person's life which have a direct impact on the person's thoughts, feelings, and actions" (24-25).⁹⁴ The macrocontext of *Alton Locke* has received more attention from scholars than its microcontext. *Alton Locke* is widely known as a Chartist novel, in which Kingsley presents sympathetic depictions of the working class whose sufferings from social injustice lead them to participate in the Chartist movement. Laissez-faire policy, Protestantism, and revolutions that swept Europe in the 1840s are the backdrops of the novel. To achieve the political rights of the working class, the Chartist movement presented three petitions in the years 1839, 1842, and 1848. After the final grand petition with six million signatures was again rejected by the House of Commons, the movement died out. *Alton Locke* follows the trajectory of the movement to the demise of the movement after the Kennington Common meeting.⁹⁵ Although Chartist leaders asserted that the movement was a peaceful protest, the government suppressed the movement from the beginning, and Chartist strikes and attacks were followed by arrests and

⁹⁴ Rambo provides more detailed explanations in *Understanding Religious Conversion*. However, since he and Farhadian give us more succinct definitions in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, I quote from Rambo and Farhadian. They also define the mesocontext, which I do not apply in reading *Alton Locke*: "[T]he mesocontext includes those aspects of the context which mediate between the macrocontexts and microcontexts, such as local government, regional politics and economics, and local religious institutions" (25).

⁹⁵ For Kingsley and Christian Socialism, see Allen, Dottin, and Noe.

transportations. Especially in 1848, the year of European revolutions, Chartists were suspected to be insurrectionists and the movement was regarded as a fatal threat to the nation. In these circumstances, the government strictly banned the proposed procession of the final petition of 10 April 1848 at the Kennington Common.

The first sentence of the novel succinctly summarizes the microcontext of Alton Locke, the eponymous protagonist: “I am a Cockney among Cockneys” (1). Alton adds that he is “a sickly, decrepit Cockney” who suffers from “asthma, . . . rickets, and consumption” as well as from “ugliness” (2). The full title of the novel is *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet*, and Alton is depicted as a tailor whose ambition and ability exceed those of his peers and aspire beyond his born environment. His mother is a strict Calvinistic Baptist, who treats her children as “children of wrath and of the devil” and teaches them that “there is a duality . . . a lifelong battle between flesh and spirit” (4, 5). The art of poetry is “tabooed” by her sect, and she forbids Alton from even looking at windows of bookshops (5). With a poet’s sensitivity and love for nature, instead of getting the literary education he yearns for, Alton as a boy is condemned to overwork as a tailor under abject conditions. Urged by his burning desire to learn, however, Alton stops at a bookshop on his way home from work and reads a couple of pages at a time. The sympathetic owner of the bookshop, Sandy Mackaye, sees Alton reading surreptitiously and lends him books, including two by Milton and Virgil, for free. This act of reading brings forth the first conversion or, rather, deconversion of the novel. His mother finds books and takes them away, refusing to talk to Alton until two ministers come to advise her two days later. The ministers examine the books, and advise Alton’s mother to let Alton keep them on condition that he will never see Mackaye again. This meeting ends with a prayer:

“And now, dear friends,” said the dark man, “let us join in offering up a few words of special intercession.”

We all knelt down, and I soon discovered that by the special intercession was meant a string of bitter and groundless slanders against poor me, twisted into the form of a prayer for my conversion, “if it were God’s will.” To which I responded with a closing “Amen,” for which I was sorry afterwards, when I recollected that it was said in merely insolent mockery. But the little faith I had was breaking up fast—not altogether, surely, by my own fault.

At all events, from that day I was emancipated from modern Puritanism.

(37)

This scene would be a typical conversion scene; the prodigal son repents and returns to the religion of his family. However, Alton’s suspicious mother cannot trust that Alton, who is among the nonelect and “children of the devil” according to her, will keep any promise (3).

Family discontent argues badly for the possibility of conversion, and, instead, this scene leads to the crisis stage. Rambo and Farhadian state that “[t]he *crisis* stage is generally a rupture in the taken-for-granted world that triggers the *quest* stage in which persons actively seek new ways of confronting their predicament” (23). When Alton comes home late from work a couple of days later, Alton’s mother gets even more suspicious and refuses to believe that he is really coming home straight from work. Irritated and excited beyond his control, Alton bursts forth, denouncing his mother’s religion altogether:

Mother . . . don't talk to me about religion, and election, and conversion, and all that—I don't' believe one word of it. . . . Religion? Nobody believes in it. The rich don't. . . . No more do the tradespeople believe in it. . . . And as for the workmen—they laugh at it all, I can tell you. . . . I don't believe a word of it—once and for all. I'm old enough to think for myself, and a free-thinker I will be, and believe nothing but what I know and understand. (53)

This declaration costs him his home; Alton moves in with Mackaye, begins attending Chartist meetings with him, and starts his quest stage. Alton has already been attracted to John Crossthwaite, a Chartist at his work, and throughout the novel Alton is deeply engaged in the Chartist movement until he is finally disillusioned at the 10 April meeting at Kennington Common at the end of the novel. This episode helps Alton seek new ways of understanding the world, and he begins to see the world in terms of class struggle.

Alton's quest stage mostly centers on his involvement with Chartism before he realizes the limits of the political system as a meaning of life. The novel's famous derangement scene, which leads him back to Christianity, comes after the Kennington Common meeting. Alton describes the meeting as a total failure: "Sullen, disappointed, desperate, I [Locke] strode along the streets that evening, careless whither I went. The People's Cause was lost—the Charter a laughing-stock" (328). Alton's day does not end there, however. He then learns that his secret love, Lillian, is engaged to his treacherous cousin, George Locke, and he witnesses them kissing. Desperate, Alton finds himself on Waterloo Bridge, ready to commit suicide. While there, he unintentionally saves a man from drowning himself and finds out that the man is Jemmy Downes, who has been

introduced earlier in the novel as exploiting his coworkers. Led to Downes's house, Alton again confronts the dire consequences of the laissez-faire theory:

And what a room! A low lean-to with wooden walls, without a single article of furniture; and through the broad chinks of the floor shone up as it were ugly glaring eyes, staring at us. They were the reflections of the rushlight in the sewer below. The stench was frightful—the air heavy with pestilence. The first breath I drew made my heart sink, and my stomach turn. But I forgot everything in the object which lay before me, as Downes tore a half-finished coat off three corpses laid side by side on the bare floor. (334-35)

Downes's babies and his wife are victims of the merciless economic system. So is Downes, who ultimately drowns himself in the sewer. The social problem still exists, but by this point Alton's previous belief that Chartism is the answer for all social-injustice problems is no more.

The final conversion narrative of the novel should be read in this context. Without thinking about his macro- and microcontexts, the derangement scene, one of the most memorable preconversion derangement scenes in the VRN, loses half of its meaning. Additionally, the other important thing to keep in mind is that the derangement scene in the chapter titled "Dreamland" should be read in relation to the conversion-narrative tradition. David Alderson's analysis of the novel reminds us that *Alton Locke* is a conversion narrative retrospectively written by the convert himself:

The narrative is written from the perspective of the converted tailor, and describes how he came to reject his Chartist beliefs after a disastrous practical involvement with the movement brought about by the manipulation, at the hands of a range of

embittered radicals, of his justified outrage at the treatment of his fellow workers.

Retrospectively, Locke laments his failings, usually failings of conscience or perception. (50)

Alton's act of writing his autobiography functions three ways. First, that Alton writes an autobiography after his conversion poses the novel in the tradition of the VRNs, many of which declare that they are written after conversion to give warnings. He started writing it while he is in prison, in the hope that it might be instructive to others, and decides to publish it at the direct command of Lady Eleanor Ellerton, whom Alton initially thought to be the enemy of his class, but who turned out to be a real sympathizer and his true guardian. Shortly before he leaves England for Texas, Eleanor assigns a new life's mission to Alton: "I trust that you still have a work to do. . . . [P]romise me that . . . you will publish, in good time, an honest history of your life; extenuating nothing, exaggerating nothing ashamed to confess or to proclaim nothing" (392). Receiving a new life's mission also indicates that Alton's conversion is a true one. More importantly, Alton's subjectivity is created as he tells his story in a certain way. Buckton argues that "the 'self' is not simply independent of or prior to autobiographical discourse but is also to some extent produced by it" (10). O'Rourke also asserts that "the central figure of an autobiography is not simply a person who has lived a series of events that are to be recorded in a text but the self that is created in the telling of the story" (133).⁹⁶ In his confessional testimony, Alton testifies against the social injustice he experiences and witnesses, but at the same time the self as Alton understands it is created via the act of

⁹⁶ See also Jo Gill's introduction: "Confession, then is not a means of expressing the irrepressible truth of prior lived experience, but a ritualized technique for producing truth. Confessional writing is poietic not mimetic, it constructs rather than reflects some pre-textual truth. It is not the free expression of the self but an effect of an ordered regime by which the self begins to conceive of itself as individual, responsible, culpable and thereby confessional" (4).

writing. In creating his new identity, like many autobiographers, Alton needs to combine his postconversion self with his preconversion self to maintain “a unity of subjectivity” (Peters 12). I argue that his dream series function as a way for Alton to preserve the totality of his self.

Taking into consideration that Alton, who has been hostile to Christianity, ends up embracing it at the end of the wild series of dreams, it can be seen that dreams function to provide “a satisfactory end” to this conversion narrative (Caldwell 16). According to Patricia Caldwell, dreams help to make the whole conversion narrative coherent:

Without that assurance [given in the dream], all the steps of the narrative would have been worthless, that is, unconvincing; with it, they are infused with meaning and conviction even though in themselves they cannot carry the mind or the reason across that mysterious gap into the heart of the experience. By exemplifying all this in its own symbolic terms, the dream “justifies” the narrative and is a fit ending for it. (25)

Indeed, Alton appears so different after his conversion that without the derangement scene it would be impossible to end the story coherently. After the dreams he comes to accept Eleanor, not Lillian, as his guardian angel. He accepts Christianity as the answer to the class struggle. It has already been pointed out that the conversion narrative is the result of a heavy self-editing process. What, then, do Alton’s strange dreams endeavor to tell the reader?

The dream series is the epitome of Alton’s life relived, and Alton is confined in his fantasies, making a spiral journey of rebirth and death in a series of evolutionary fantasies, until he reaches the correct understanding of his life, the people around him,

and Christianity, and he is ready for his conversion. His “real” life consists of three stages: the early stage when his mother’s harsh religious doctrines govern his thoughts; the middle stage when he tries to get answers for social injustice from philosophy, literature, economic theory, and the Chartist movement; and the last stage when he finally embraces Christianity as the ultimate answer for all of his problems. He relives these stages again in the series of fantasies, but now he is both a spectator and main character of his life. He commands a more objective view of his life’s events, and his comprehensive understanding of the interactive meaning of events gives him a chance to make different choices. Indeed, Alton states that “my fancy, long pent-up and crushed by circumstances, burst out in uncontrollable wildness, and swept my other faculties with it helpless away over all heaven and earth, presenting to me, as in a vast kaleidoscope, fantastic symbols of all I had ever thought, or read, or felt” (338).

At the first stage of Alton’s fantasy, Alton lives his life again, from his rejection of his mother’s religion to his socialist life and sees the meaninglessness in both beliefs. The first ghostly figure he sees in his fantasy is, fittingly, his mother. Without looking at the face of the person at the foot of his bed, he knows “instinctively” that it is his mother: “I knew instinctively that it was my mother. I called to her again and again, but she did not answer. She moved slowly away, and passed out through the wall of the room” (338). Like his real mother, this figure does not respond to the bitter cry coming from an ailing soul. He desperately tries to follow her, but in vain:

I tried to follow her, but could not. An enormous, unutterable weight seemed to lie upon me. The bedclothes grew and grew before me, and upon me, into a vast mountain, millions of miles in height. Then it seemed all glowing red,

like the cone of a volcano. I heard the roaring of the fires within, the rattling of the cinders down the heaving slope. . . . A raging thirst had seized me. I tried to drink the river-water: but it was boiling hot—sulphurous—reeking of putrefaction. (338)

The fire mountain and sulphurous air stand for the hell that, as his mother repeatedly threatens, the unconverted Alton is destined to fall into. When he tries to follow his mother and her religion, Alton acquires an unquenchable thirst instead of a peaceful rest.⁹⁷ In the early part of the novel, when Alton leaves the religion of his mother, he begins pursuing secular knowledge. In the fantasy, he finds himself “wandering along the lower ridge of the Himalaya,” and he says, “The longing of my life to behold that cradle of mankind was satisfied” (338, 339). Just as his thirst for education and access to the human mind fails to give satisfaction to him in his real life, here in the fantasy he soon finds that these are not the answers that he is looking for. In a Hindoo temple he is surrounded by threatening images of pagan gods and goddesses: “The bull Nundi rose and tried to gore me; hundred-handed gods brandished quoits and sabres round my head; and Kali dropped the skull from her gore-dripping jaws, to clutch me for her prey” (339). This Indian imagery refigures his secularism as paganism and Alton as a pagan, a favorite target of conversion. From here, Alton begins following different paths and revises his life. While in real life Alton continues following the secular guidance of his Chartist

⁹⁷ This image of sulphurous water that cannot quench thirst implies that Alton’s mother’s religion is not the ultimate solution Alton is seeking. In the Bible, Jesus frequently uses the image of water that satisfies thirst forever. For example, Jesus says to a Samaritan woman that “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4.14).

friends and his reason, upon realizing that what he believes to be solutions do not provide what he wants, he feels the mountain give way under his feet.⁹⁸

At this point Alton in his fantasy is where Alton in his “real” life is: his endeavors to find meaning in his life have failed so far, and he does not know where to turn next. It is at this point in this relived life that Alton experiences the evolutionary fantasy, a second chance for Alton to experience and reorganize his shattered life with Eleanor as a Beatrice and true friend, preparing him for his final conversion. Alton has been hostile to Eleanor up to this part of his life and has always thought that Eleanor does not understand working-class life. Now in his fantasy, he sees her as an angel, a Beatrice, and it is Eleanor who initiates and ends the evolution fantasy. While he imagines himself to be under the debris of a tumbled-down temple, crushed and blinded by dust, Eleanor comes by and puts him on the right path: “And Eleanor came by, and took my soul in the palm of her hand, as the angels did Faust’s, and carried it to a cavern by the seaside, and dropped it in; and I fell and fell for ages” (339). His evolution fantasy starts. Alton first imagines himself as a madrepora: “I was at the lowest point of created life: a madrepora rooted to the rock, fathoms below the tide-mark” (340). At this stage he sees Lillian and Eleanor pass by:

And I heard Eleanor and Lillian talking, as they floated past me through the deep, for they were two angels; and Lillian said, “When will he be one again?”

And Eleanor said, “He who falls from the golden ladder must climb through ages to its top. He who tears himself in pieces by his lusts, ages only can

⁹⁸ It is his mother who, “seizing the pillars of the portico, bent them like reeds” (339). The reappearance of his mother in his pagan fantasy here shows that Alton is still under the influence of the early religious education of his mother.

make him one again. The madrepora shall become a shell, and the shell a fish, and the fish a bird, and the bird a beast; and then he shall become a man again, and see the glory of the latter days.” (340)

His evolution fantasy follows Eleanor’s prediction step by step. He soon begins to multiply and evolve and becomes a soft crab, a remora, an ostrich, a mylodon, a baby ape, and a human baby, and, finally, he becomes a Moses, a prophet for the people at the end of the series of dreams. And at the end of his Moses stage, it is again Eleanor who finishes the derangement scene: “You have learned what it is to be a man. . . . Awake!” (354).

Alton’s evolutionary fantasies allow him to review his relationship with others correctly, putting the three women of his life—his mother, Lillian, and Eleanor—in their right places. As his relationship with Lillian dominates his real life, the early part of his evolution fantasy reflects his real life’s love triangle.⁹⁹ He constantly sees George, Lillian, and himself, but his abject condition as a lower and weaker form of life presents him as a miserable rival for Lillian’s hand. In his real life Alton has believed that it is his class that prevents Lillian from becoming his angel, believing that Lillian is a Beatrice, a redeeming angel for him. He realizes now that she is a beautiful yet ignorant girl who does not have any saving power and, worse, who might be very similar to George, who does not have any principle by which to guide his life except self-interest. In his real life Alton thinks that he fails to attract Lillian because she is much better than he is. Now Alton rejects her in the final stage of his evolutionary fantasy. In his soft-crab stage, Lillian and George laugh at the soft-crab-Alton, and George crushes the soft-crab-Alton.

⁹⁹ For Kingsley’s use of “the dream to convey the element of sexual lust . . . in Alton’s attraction to Lillian,” see Haynes (32).

At the next stage, as a remora, Alton does his best to save Lillian, a flying fish in this fantasy, from George, a huge shark, but just as Alton stops George from chasing Lillian-flying fish, she turns and swims into his open jaws. Next, Alton as an ostrich is attacked and killed by George, an ounce that Lillian, an Amazon queen, sets free to get Alton; “[A]s I lay quivering and dying, she [Lillian] reined in her horse above me, and looked down at me with beautiful, pitiless eyes; and a wild Arab tore the plumes from my wings, and she took them and wreathed them in her golden hair” (341). In his mylodon stage, Lillian is one of the dryads living on a tree he wants to tear down, and George is “an American backwoodsman” who is digging for gold under the tree (343). At first Alton as a mylodon simply enjoys his physical power, but upon seeing the dryads, he awakes “again to humanity” (343). Alton climbs the tree, but soon he realizes that the tree is about to fall under his weight on George: “I [Alton] looked round, and saw that my cousin knelt directly in the path of its fall. . . . I tried, convulsively, to hold the tree up, but it was too late; a sudden gust of air swept by, and down it rushed, with a roar like a whirlwind, and leaving my cousin untouched, struck me full across the loins, broke my backbone, and pinned me to the ground in mortal agony” (344). The dying mylodon-Alton sees dryads wither and die on the ground and hears Lillian cry that Alton has murdered her. It is again George who carries Lillian away.

Lillian’s power in Alton’s real life is too strong to efface, even with this series of fantasies, and Alton, in fact, dies in his fantasy and is saved by Eleanor one more time before he finally frees himself from Lillian’s power. In the next stage Alton becomes a baby ape, but now he is very close to a human being: “I [Alton] saw my face reflected in the pool—a melancholy, thoughtful countenance. . . . And I felt stirring in me germs of a

new and higher consciousness” (345). However, he is not a human being yet and needs to experience death one more time. And, of course, it is again George, “a hunter missionary,” who kills Alton (345). Alton sees Lillian, an Eve-like woman, with a baby: “I saw Lillian coming along a flowery path—decked as Eve might have been, the day she turned from Paradise. The skins of gorgeous birds were round her waist; her hair was wreathed with fragrant tropic flowers. On her bosom lay a baby—it was my cousin’s. I knew her, and hated her” (345). Finding Alton among the boughs, Lillian “pointed up to [ape-Alton] in terror and disgust. . . . He [George] threw up the muzzle of his rifle carelessly, and fired—[ape-Alton] fell dead, but conscious still” (345). Alton’s body is dissected in the settlement, and as people look at his dissected carcass, “Eleanor glided by again, like an angel, and drew my soul out of the knot of nerves, with one velvet fingertip” (346).

Alton experiences a mysterious rebirth once more, this time as a human child in a biblical story to repeat his real life again, finally succeeding in reading his life, his relationship with people, and his endeavor to fight social injustice acceptably for his final conversion. In this final fantasy, Alton belongs to a tribe that is traveling westward at the command of “the All-Father,” and he becomes a child who grows up to be a Moses for his people. (347). When the tribe confronts a new Alps that block their way, Alton is given a chance to see the results of experiments in political economy. Prayers fail to make the mountain fall, and their king suggests boring the mountain wall while they till the ground for food. When some stronger men make claims that they should get more land, the king persuades them to work more on the mountain so that all people are “equal” and “free,” and all are “brothers” with “one work, and one hope, and one All-

Father” (348). After twenty years, the king dies, and Alton, now a man, witnesses that his people now begin to engage in class struggle as stronger people grow richer and weaker people become poorer. As in his real life, Alton tries in vain to teach the rich to return the land to the poor. Instead of listening to him, his people present “a veiled maiden,” Lillian, as a bribe (349). Although Lillian herself also tempts Alton by clasping Alton “round the neck, and cr[ying], ‘Come! I will be your bride, and you shall be rich and powerful,’” Alton refuses to listen to the people and “bored the mountain seven years, weeping” (350). Meanwhile, the multiplied poor become a serious threat to the rich. A famine sweeps the land and the desperate poor rise against the rich. Alton again speaks, this time to the mob:

Then I ran out, and cried to them, “Fools! will you do as these rich did, and neglect the work of God? If you do to them as they have done to you, you will sin as they sinned, and devour each other at the last, as they devoured you. The old paths are best. Let each man, rich or poor, have his equal share of the land, as it was at first, and go up and dig through the mountain, and possess the good land beyond, where no man need jostle his neighbour, or rob him, when the land becomes too small for you. . . . For the last time, who will go up with me to the mountain?” (351-52)

Of course this fantasy’s imperialism is too obvious to overlook, and its solution is too simple to be realistic. Imperial expansion and reeducation of the poor are naïve solutions to the complex problems class struggles cause. What is significant in this fantasy is that Alton now comes to represent not the poor only but all of his people. In this coarse drama, Alton learns to be a true leader of the people by being a neutral figure who knows

how to resist temptations and to decide on a right path for his people. Upon hearing Alton, all follow him up to the mountain and at “the first stroke that I [Alton] struck a crag fell out; and behold, the light of day! and far below us the good land and large, stretching away boundless towards the western sun” (352). This happy ending of the fantasy also brings forth a happy ending for the dream series and the conversion plot. Refusing to become a new king for his people, Alton hears a prophetess sing a sweet song for them. The prophetess turns to Alton at the end of the song and says:

“And for you,” she said, looking on me, “your penance is accomplished.

You have learned what it is to be a man. You have lost your life and saved it. He that gives up house, or land, or wife, or child, for God’s sake, it shall be repaid him an hundredfold. Awake!”

Surely I knew that voice. She lifted her veil. That face was Lillian’s? No!

—Eleanor’s!

Gently she touched my hand—I sank down into soft, weary, happy sleep.

(354)

Previously it was his mother who expelled Alton into the world. Now Eleanor returns him back to a paradise. He overcomes his birth family by voluntarily distancing himself from his mother and her menacing religion and by finding a surrogate family in Eleanor, Crossthwaite, and Crossthwaite’s wife Katie, with his old friend Mackaye as a father.¹⁰⁰

Alton comes back to himself and finds himself transformed:

What need of many words? Slowly, and with relapses into insensibility, I

passed, like one who recovers from drowning, through the painful gate of birth

¹⁰⁰ Eleanor plays multiple roles of family members and friend here, but her conspicuous role is as a mother and Beatrice: “Her [Eleanor’s] voice was like an angel’s when she spoke to me—a friend, mother, sister, all in one” (354).

into another life. The fury of passion had been replaced by a delicious weakness. The thunder-clouds had passed roaring down the wind, and the calm bright holy evening was come. My heart, like a fretful child, had stamped and wept itself to sleep. I was past even gratitude; infinite submission and humility, feelings too long forgotten, absorbed my whole being. (354)

The novel makes it clear that the derangement scene signals a new birth experience, the beginning of conversion. The words Alton uses to express his interiority—"gratitude," "submission," and "humility"—are very popular words in conversion narratives. His images of clouds and a calm evening clearly indicate that this near-death experience results in the conversion of the sufferer. This derangement scene also prepares Alton for what waits for him at his recovery. With Mackaye's legacy, he and the Crossthwaites are to move to Texas and remain there for seven years. Alton is to become a people's prophet who will pass along those lessons he has learned in his final fantasy.

There remains for Alton to relearn the lessons his dreams taught him in the real world. Eleanor again acts as a divine agent, an "advocate," to use Rambo's term. Eleanor builds a bridge between Alton and other Christians and initiates the interaction between Alton and Christianity. She reads from the Bible, à Kempis, and Hebrew psalms and then directly talks to him about her God:

She seemed to . . . guess . . . the workings of my heart; for now . . . she began to speak of rest and labour, of death and life . . . and so she wandered on in her speech to Him who died for us. . . . She talked of Him, as Mary may have talked, just risen from His feet. She spoke of Him as I had never heard Him spoken of before—with a tender passionate loyalty, kept down and softened by the deepest

awe. The sense of her intense belief, shining out in every lineament of her face, carried conviction to my heart more than ten thousand arguments could do. It must be true! Was not the power of it around her like a glory? She spoke of Him as near us—watching us—in words of such vivid eloquence that I turned half-startled to her, as if I expected to see Him standing by her side. . . .

She spoke of him as the great Reformer; and yet as the true conservative. . . . She spoke of him as the true demagogue—the Champion of the poor; and yet as the true King, above and below all earthly rank. (359-60)

Alton now meets a personal God for the first time in his life. What is interesting here is the proselytizing skills Eleanor demonstrates. Eleanor uses images and languages that are familiar to Alton to appeal to him. She introduces God as “the Creator, the Word, the Inspirer, the only perfect Artist, the Fountain of all Genius,” the one who will bring “[l]iberty, equality, and fraternity” to humankind, and the Bible as Alton’s “charter” (360, 365, 366). After intensive interaction with Eleanor, he commits to her religion: “I see it—I see it all now. Oh, my God! my God! what infidels we have been!” (369). Alton even agrees with Eleanor that “Chartism must die to itself before it has a chance of living to God” (383).

In typical deathbed scenes, it is usually the friend of the dying person who undergoes conversion. Charles Bampton, the hero of Conybeare’s *Perversion: or, The Causes and Consequences of Infidelity*, completes the process of conversion by the bedside of his dying friend, W. Hawkins. He declares to his dying friend that “my doubts are at rest. Your Saviour is my Saviour, and your God my God” (3: 309). Likewise, in *Jessica’s First Prayer*, Daniel Standring finishes the last stage of his conversion by the

side of Jessica's deathbed.¹⁰¹ In *Alton Locke*, Alton performs the role of the dying person and the convert. He "dies" several times in his wild series of evolution fantasies, recovers and converts afterward. Burstein states that the deathbed is a popular locale through which an author can testify the "efficacy" of the faith he or she advocates by presenting the exemplary Christian death of a person who belongs to the religious tradition the author supports (340). Alton converts in his own sick room and he proves the genuine nature of his conversion by dying a "good death" on his voyage to Texas and leaving the conversion narrative behind him as a warning. Like a true Moses, he sees the land of promise but dies before he reaches it. Through his fantasies, Alton forms a new surrogate family and learns how to die a Christian socialist death.

"Many Silences"

As seen in *Alton Locke*, the conversion moment does not occupy a substantial part of the VRN. We get circumstantial evidence of the conversion, but the moment of conversion itself is not highlighted. Alton's derangement scene and the brief following conversation with Eleanor give us an understanding that Alton has converted, but his inner struggles and detailed description of the traces of thoughts are deemphasized. In fact, *Alton Locke* is not atypical in deemphasizing or shrouding the moment of conversion in silence. Victorian religious novels and spiritual autobiographies allot less space for the moment of conversion and more pages for details of preconversion and postconversion life. John Henry Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), for example, does not

¹⁰¹ While most sufferers in deathbed scenes actually die, in both these cases, they do not. The novel, *Jessica's First Prayer*, implies that Jessica's first prayer, "[I]f Mr. Dan'el wants me, please to let me stay a little longer, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen," is granted and saves her from dying (90). In *Perversion*, while Hawkins survives, Bampton dies shortly after the scene.

elaborate on Newman's inner thoughts at the moment of conversion as John D. Barbour points out: "Newman passes over in silence the moment of his entrance into the Roman Catholic Church. It is his loss of faith in the Anglican tradition, rather than his secure grasping of true belief, that is the turning point and the most vividly rendered scene" (31-32). In Newman's novel, *Loss and Gain* (1848), the conversion moment does not receive any spotlight. While almost every page of the novel is dominated by theological discussions, for most of the time Charles Reding, the protagonist, does not participate in these discussions; neither does he express any affinity with the Roman Catholic Church early in the novel. He expresses his skepticism about the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, yet he remains silent about his religious beliefs. His silence extends to the moment of conversion. Barbour argues that many Victorian autobiographies demonstrate "evasions and repressions of this painful topic [of conversion]" (71). A sociological approach to conversion reminds us that conversion very often involves the convert's painful experiences of leaving his or her familiar community. It is then no wonder that the moment is passed over in the narrative of the convert. Additionally, I agree with Buckton that silence gives the writer a power to keep his or her narrative and identity in control. According to Buckton, "[T]he productive power of secrecy [is] to constitute particular forms of subjectivity" (12). The writing of the self helps to create the writer's new identity, as discussed in an earlier section. Silence over some parts of his or her narrative guarantees that this new identity remains as he or she has created it.

Silence over the moment of conversion has a huge impact on the treatment of religious conversion in the novels of Victorian writers. Typically, in the VRN, silence is the marker of the conversion moment. In the following scene from Margaret Oliphant's

The Perpetual Curate (1864), Frank Wentworth hears from his brother Gerald, an Anglican rector, of the reasons behind his conversion. The reasons are, however, not narrated to the reader—they are dismissed for being “not unprecedented or unparalleled,” in other words, for being too common to detail:

[W]ithout looking at Frank . . . he [Gerald] went into the history of his struggle—a history not unprecedented or unparalleled, such as has been told to the world before now by men who have gone through it, in various shapes, with various amounts of sophistry and simplicity. (1: 256-57)

There appears to be a belief underneath the silence or you-know-what-it-is kind of logic of this propagandistic genre that the message of a novel can be delivered more powerfully and eloquently in silence. By allowing the conversion to happen offstage, the novel relies on the intertextual context, leading the reader to imagine the scene by relying on past reading and experiences. I mentioned earlier that the Victorian religious novel belongs to the exemplary genre, teaching the reader by providing stereotypical examples. To achieve narratological unity, the religious novel again relies on stereotypes. If the moment of conversion is silenced and erased in the narrative, stereotypical indicators of conversion moments abound around the conversion moment in scenes of derangement and hallucination in deathbed and sickroom.

There seems to be one more important reason for Victorian fiction writers to deemphasize the moment of conversion in fiction. Conversion narratives inevitably have a predictable ending, the conversion of a protagonist. Barbour states that “Christian narratives depend on an anticipated ending: the attainment of true faith in God” (15). In the earlier decades of the Victorian period, religious novels that followed the conversion

narrative tradition ended with the conversion of the protagonist. The predictable ending was not the focus of the novel; rather, how to get there received more attention. In the traditional conversion narrative written shortly after the conversion, the narrative comprises three stages: preconversion life, the moment of conversion, and brief postconversion life. Since the conversion narrative is written retrospectively shortly after the conversion, its description of the preconversion life is the only way to predict the future life of the convert: he or she will be what he or she was not. In religious novels with a conversion plot, in the earlier part of a story, the preconversion life of a protagonist, which differs case by case, of course, gets more attention before it ends with “nonnarratable elements” of religious change. D. A. Miller states that “[w]hat defines a nonnarratable element is its incapacity to generate a story” (5). It marks the end of a narrative because no more tension arises from nonnarratable elements such as a happy marriage and conversion to “the true church” for the story to continue.

At the same time, as Susan Griffin points out, predictability of a story also functions to attract the reader. In her reading of Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, she argues that knowing the story in advance could have enticed readers to buy the novel:

But is the fact that the Woman in White and Count Fosco have secret identities ever really a secret? . . . It is a *signaled* secrecy, an *advertised* disguise that are operative in sensationalism’s readerly engagement, as when Count Fosco teases, “I am a Jesuit if you choose to think so.” . . . Like the lurid covers that entice purchasers at railway stalls, robes and masks, *when recognized as such*, awake audience expectations—expectations based on prior experience—and direct reading modes. (“Yellow Mask” 68; italics in the original)

Likewise, Basil Meyer suggests that most of the readers of romantic fiction know that these types of novels would most likely involve the death of a heroine. However, rather than preventing the reader from reading these novels, these predictable events make the novel more palatable for the reader: “[R]eaders enjoy, even if at an unconscious level, the *prospect*, presented as they read, of a heroine dying for love” (291; italics in the original). Indicators of what comes at the end—robes and masks in *The Woman in White* or bright eyes, a long neck, emotional shocks, and a long walk in damp air in romantic fiction—function to make these otherwise predictable stories more stylish and attractive. The greatest innovation Victorian religious novels make comes when religious novels turn what is “nonnarratable” to “narratable” by borrowing from the popular marriage plot. The conversion narrative does not provide an explanation of underlying reasons for conversion but utilizes marriage to give sanction or disapproval. Of course, the soon-to-be convert is exposed to the confusingly intricate theological debates as a heroine is exposed to many other male figures around her. However, what he or she thinks before the moment of conversion does not seem to affect his or her final decision. Adapted for the religious novel genre, the marriage plot is one of the markers that inform the reader whether the conversion or religious position in a given novel is right within its moral economy. For example, the anonymously published *Allerton and Dreux; or, The War of Opinion* (1851) by Jean Ingelow approves a High Churchman’s and a Low Churchman’s reconciliation and peaceful cooperation by giving both men the women they love at the end. Benjamin Disraeli’s *Lothair* (1870) ends the long and complicated story of Lothair’s political and religious struggles that, in fact, happen in a year with a happy engagement. To earn his love, Lothair constantly has to resist the Roman Catholic Church’s sometimes

secret, oftentimes forceful schemes to convert him. Hall Caine's *The Christian* (1897) also uses marriage to sanction the hero's life as a modern Jesus in London. Although he receives fatal wounds from an angry mob, his old love marries him on his deathbed and promises to continue his work. As all these cases indicate, the marriage plot was a useful device to signal the end of a protagonist's spiritual journey.¹⁰²

"The Three Happiest Years of My Life"

The religious novel's narrative innovations are nowhere so clearly illustrated as in the Catholic conversion narrative. Imagined as a community that may fatally undermine Britishness, the Catholic Church became a target of blustering condemnation in numerous religious novels of the day. Novels that imagined the Catholic Church as surreptitiously snaring promising young men and innocent women proliferated alongside religious novels written by those who had converted to the Roman Catholic Church and found it necessary to defend their position by shaping their conversion narratives as a kind of apology. At the core of the debates in these novels were the Catholic Church's belief in transubstantiation (the belief in the miraculous transformation of sacramental bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist); its ritualized and ceremonious style of worship; the practice of private confession—whether the practice is wholly Catholic or rather it is in fact, in accordance with the Anglican Church's doctrine—and its approval of celibacy. This section discusses Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* in the context of these religious debates and argues that *Villette* directly places itself within the tradition

¹⁰² Of course there are negative or abortive marriage-plot novels that end with a broken engagement. A broken engagement indicates either a wrong conversion or a wrong religious position. Or, as in Felicia Skene's *Hidden Depths* (1866), it is used to save the heroine from a lifetime of misery she would have to endure if she married a hypocrite who ruined the poor girl whom the heroine finds and tries to save.

of the religious novel by adroitly adopting *both* sides of the Catholic religious novels tradition: not only does the novel utilize the Catholic conversion narrative by heavily relying on the narrative's patterns in its religious plot, but it also engages with a countertradition of the conversion narrative that reflects the anti-Catholic sentiment of the time.¹⁰³

Fear of losing individuality as well as the above-mentioned xenophobia—the fear that Catholicism would undermine British national identity—lurked beneath much anti-Catholic sentiment. To most Protestants, “popery” meant, in other words, the deprivation of mental independence, constant surveillance and control, and medieval superstition, while Protestantism signified freedom from arbitrary and despotic human authority, progress, and celebration of family ideology.¹⁰⁴ Polarized interpretations of private judgment and different understandings about the Jesuits were abundant in Catholic and anti-Catholic religious novels. Protestants' free use of private judgment—which resulted from “promiscuous Bible reading,” as Catholics' put it—was set against the Roman Catholic Church's reliance upon the authority of the church (papal infallibility) and was condemned by Catholics as a dangerous practice (Gasquet 84); the Jesuits were praised as representatives of true authority or criticized as Rome's secret agents.¹⁰⁵ For example,

¹⁰³ I want to keep my distance from both the popular Brontë scholarship that reads the novel as a blatant anti-Catholic novel and scholars such as Diana Peschier and Gayla McGlamery who argue against such reading by saying that *Villette* just reflects the popular anti-Catholic sentiment of the time.

¹⁰⁴ As early as in 1821, John Pierce argued for “the sufficiency of the scriptures, and the right of private judgment” of Protestantism in his lecture about “the erroneous, dangerous, and aspiring pretensions of the Romish Church” (20, 3). He attacked creeds as “the dictates of spiritual tyranny” and condemned the authoritarianism of the Roman Catholic Church for claiming that only its doctrines were right while preventing anyone from examining them (17). In 1850, George Henry Lewes also argued in “The Pope, or Free Thought?” that “[t]he master-principle of Protestantism—as we often reiterate in these columns—is the liberty of private judgment. It is the protest of the free Soul against the authority of man. . . . [T]he great battle that is to be fought is that between Authority and Liberty, and men must declare themselves either for the Pope or for Free Thought (780).

¹⁰⁵ Robert Lee Wolff notes, “[A]t the apex of Protestant anti-Catholic emotions stood the Jesuits, since Elizabethan days always suspect, often rightly, of involvement in all politically subversive movements.

Father Eustace: A Tale of the Jesuits (1847), an anti-Catholic novel by Frances Milton Trollope, warns its reader against the Roman Catholic Church's request for blind obedience to the clergy—which, according to Protestants, made Catholic laypeople mere tools of the church—by depicting Edward Stormont's realization that he has been only an instrument of the Roman Catholic Church. Under his real name, Edward Stormont, the young and handsome Father Eustace is sent to England to convert a rich heiress, to persuade her to become a nun and to donate her property to the Roman Catholic Church. In due course, he and the heiress fall in love with each other. Then, to his chagrin and consternation, Edward learns that Rome has, in fact, sent him to fall in love with her, hoping that she will become a nun when she finds out that he, a priest, cannot marry her.

Another trope of anti-Catholic novels is the appearance of usually mysterious Catholic characters who predict the protagonist's conversion, long before the protagonist knows, as it were, that he or she is in a conversion plot. Rumors of future conversion circulate freely in these novels. Sometimes the protagonist experiences a mystical moment, in which a supernatural voice calls him or her to follow the "true Church."¹⁰⁶ Often a belief in miracles is demonstrated, as seen in Newman's *Loss and Gain* (1848). In the last scene in Charles Reding's secular life, Charles exorcizes a devil, manifested in

Jesuits lived under a discipline even more rigorous than the ordinary priest, were known to be particularly learned, were believed to be in constant mysterious contact with papal authorities, and stopped at nothing to carry out their dangerous missions, the very incarnation of the black-clad, sinister, sacerdotal enemy, who never walk but always glide" (Wolff 31).

¹⁰⁶ Again, *Loss and Gain* provides fine examples of mystical moments and preconversion prophecy. The novel does not give any clear indication of Reading's religious tendency. Nevertheless, before his conversion, he finds out that he is calling, "half unconsciously," on a lonely street at night without any obvious reason, "O mighty Mother! I come, O mighty Mother! I come; but I am far from home. Spare me a little; I come with what speed I may, but I am slow of foot, and not as others, O mighty Mother!" (256). Even before this scene, all the other characters around him appear to have known that he would convert; his school banishes him lest he should "corrupt [others'] minds" and his close sister Mary predicts that "[w]e shall see you a Roman Catholic" (186, 200).

a shape of a visitor who comes to cure Reading's Catholicism, by holding out a crucifix to the visitor.

The religious plot of *Villette* closely follows the pattern of the Catholic conversion narrative. To begin with, a divine presence seems to lead Lucy to Madame Beck's *Pensionnat de Demoiselles*. From the beginning "a moving mystery—the Aurora Borealis"—leads her way (53). "[T]he imagery of the Exodus" that dominates *Villette* allows us to read the Aurora Borealis as "a pillar of fire," God's device for leading the children of Israel through the wilderness (Williams 141).¹⁰⁷ Until Lucy reaches her final destination, the scene of her conversion narrative, mystical help appears to direct her journey in London, on the Continent, and finally in Villette. In Villette at night, after losing her trunks and her sense of direction while attempting to run away from two strangers who follow her, she thinks she is lost only to learn that she has miraculously reached her final destination, Madame Beck's *pensionnat*. This coincidence is explicitly marked as providential intervention: "Providence said, 'Stop here; this is *your* inn'" (79; italics in the original).

After mysteriously arriving at her destination, Lucy begins to notice and to criticize Catholic customs and systems of surveillance. After witnessing Madame's "inspection," which ranges from gazing at Lucy's sleeping face to taking her keys from her luggage and copying them, Lucy soon finds out that she is under severe and constant surveillance both by her pupils and her colleagues. Lucy castigates, among many Catholic customs, the loss of individual mentality of Catholics, as seen in her criticism of "la lecture pieuse." She renames it "a wholesome mortification of the Intellect, a useful humiliation of the Reason" (143). Her criticism of the Catholic Church becomes more

¹⁰⁷ Also, see Exodus 14.

caustic as time goes on. A few pages later, Lucy bitterly condemns the Catholic Church's doctrine, equating it with Lucifer's: "'Eat, drink, and live!' she [the Catholic Church] says. 'Look after your bodies; leave your souls to me.' . . . Lucifer just offers the same terms: 'All this power will I give thee, and the glory of it. . . . If thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine!'" (157).¹⁰⁸ What Lucy criticizes about the Catholic Church is, most of all, its demand for blind obedience and the consequent lapse of morality and intellect.

Notwithstanding these harsh remarks, however, we find Lucy at a confessional in the next religious scene. The confessional scene described in the novel closely resembles the personal experience of Charlotte Brontë in Brussels when she went in to a confessional and actually made a confession to a Roman priest.¹⁰⁹ Of course, Patrick Brontë, an Anglican clergyman, would have believed that at the moment of her confession his daughter Charlotte became a Catholic. Charlotte is well aware that going to a confessional will be read as the first step of conversion. In the novel, the pattern of

¹⁰⁸ What Lucy has experienced so far in Catholic Labassecour appears to reflect contemporary anti-Catholic writings. "The Blight of Popery" (1851) imagines a Protestant's journey to a Catholic country: "When an enlightened traveler passes from the domains of Protestantism to those of the Romish Church, he immediately perceives that he has entered upon a strange territory, over which a base and gloomy genius seems to preside. The mental, moral, and social aspect of mankind are in many respects changed. A blight shrivels up the buddings of intellectual vigour, a barren selfishness blasts the healthfulness of moral feeling, and dark suspicion lowers over every face and destroys the blithesome play of animating spirit" (41). The article criticizes "clergy and soldiers" as "parasites of a despotism which controls the liberty of thought and action" and argues that "[t]he ubiquitous priests and monks furnish a constant memento that conscience is under the yoke, and that no freedom of judgment is allowed. . . . The development of mind is thus painfully cramped, and the range of mental acquirements is contracted within a narrow compass" (42).

¹⁰⁹ In her letter to her sister Emily dated 2 September 1843, she wrote: "An odd whim came into my head. . . I took a fancy to change myself into a Catholic and go and make a real confession to see what it was like. . . . I commenced with saying I was a foreigner and had been brought up a Protestant. . . . I was determined to confess, and at last he said he would allow me because it might be the first step towards returning to the true church. I actually did confess—a real confession. When I had done he told me his address, and said that every morning I was to go to the rue du Parc—to his house—and he would reason with me and try to convince me of the error and enormity of being a Protestant!!! I promised faithfully to go. Of course, however, the adventure stops there, and I hope I shall never see the priest again. I think you had better not tell Papa of this. He will not understand that it was only a freak, and will perhaps think I am going to turn Catholic." Charlotte Brontë, *Letters* 1: 329-30.

the contemporary conversion narrative repeats here, as Lucy seems to be on the verge of conversion. That Lucy finds herself drawn to a confessional not by any premeditated decision to convert but by the bells of the church that “seemed to call me in to the *salut*” renders this scene almost identical to that of the conversion narrative in which a protagonist is led to a conversion by a mystical voice (198). Like Brontë’s real-life confessor, the priest in the novel, Père Silas as we later learn, plays the role of a mystical figure who prophesizes that Lucy will convert: “It is my own conviction that these impressions under which you are smarting are messengers from God to bring you back to the true church” (200). While she does not indeed convert at this moment, Lucy leaves some room for conversion as a future possibility. She acknowledges that Père Silas’s “arms,” his “sentimental French kindness,” “could influence [her]” (201). Although Lucy does not visit the priest on the next day (in fact, she could not, since on the same evening of her confession she fainted and was carried to La Terrasse, John Graham’s house in Villette, to convalesce), Lucy herself admits that she might have become a nun if she did. When Graham asks if she is a Catholic, Lucy ambiguously and meaningfully replies, “Not yet” (233).

Père Silas serves as a mystic figure of the conversion narrative throughout the novel. He later throws his enigmatic prediction to Lucy one more time: “Daughter, you *shall* be what you *shall* be!” (496; italics in the original). Lucy understands the implication of the prediction, yet by now she seems to have decided to resist the Catholic Church. She notes, “Few of us know what we are to come to certainly, but for all that had happened yet, I had good hopes of living and dying a sober-minded protestant” (496). That Lucy describes “sober-minded” as the characteristic of her being a Protestant

implies her belief that the Catholic Church does not permit mental independence. By then, additionally, Lucy learns that what Père Silas said in the confessional, that he will “[o]n no account” “lose sight of” her, are not empty words (201). She has already heard from Graham that it was Père Silas who came to rescue her when she fainted: “[I]t seems . . . [that] he had esteemed it a Christian duty to watch when you quitted the church, and so to manage as not to lose sight of you, till you should have reached home” (231). Père Silas confirms her suspicion: “Nor have I for a day lost sight of you, nor for an hour failed to take in you a rooted interest” (495).

Realizing that she has been under constant surveillance from Silas as well, Lucy comes to interpret the chain of events at Madame Walravens’s as the Catholic party’s—mostly Madame Beck and Père Silas’s—scheme to convert her, or at least to separate her from M. Paul Emanuel. What Lucy learns from what happens at Madame Walravens’s is that Catholics around her never act without detailed schemes that serve for a definite purpose, in this case her conversion to the Catholic Church *and* her detachment from M. Paul. She also realizes that she and M. Paul were under “the surveillance of a sleepless eye [cast] through that mystic lattice at which [Lucy] had knelt once, and to which M. Emanuel drew nigh month by month—the sliding panel of the confessional” (513). Once she understands how the Catholic Church works through surveillance, confession, and deprivation of mental independence, Lucy realizes that to remain a Protestant, she needs to resist all three; to maintain her independence, her right to private judgment, Lucy needs to resist surveillance and the strong impulse to confess, which she only partially represses.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ “Partially,” since, “the text of *Villette* is itself arguably such a subverted confession, a letter addressed to all readers and no reader, which speaks but does not have to hear a reply” (Clark-Beattie 824). Her

Surveillance, indeed, becomes one of the dominant tropes of the novel along with Lucy's control of her impulse to confess.¹¹¹ Noticing that Lucy not only passively observes Madame Beck's inspection of her personal belongings but also confesses that she is "fascinated" by the "beautiful . . . adroitness [and] exemplary . . . care" of Madame's search, many critics argue that Lucy tacitly accepts the system of surveillance (145). Furthermore, they also argue that Lucy adopts the same system that she criticizes. Penny Boumelha even suggests that Lucy adopts all three practices she abhors, which are "surveillance, confession and duplicity" (103), in her narration ("duplicity" since her narration, which is a form of confession, is not reliable; "surveillance" since her narration is a record of what she learns by spying on others). Following such a reading, Judith Williams claims that Lucy "becomes a spy," even if it is only "to avoid being surprised by unexpected visions, and thus to escape the feelings these visions will evoke" (83). Diane Long Hoeveler and Lisa Jadwin also state that "Lucy too enlists surveillance," while she expresses aversion to Madame Beck's practice "in order to present 'reality' to the reader" (129). I argue, by contrast, that what Lucy does as a narrator does not fit into what is understood as surveillance in the novel. "Surveillance" in the novel means "supervision for the purpose of direction or control," as Madame Beck's educational surveillance and Père Silas's religious surveillance imply.¹¹² On the contrary, Lucy does not deliberately gather information to control others. She merely observes them.¹¹³ If

unreliable narrative might be read as her attempt to rein in a confessing impulse in her confession to the reader and to resist being read through.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Hoeveler and Jadwin 129-30.

¹¹² This definition is from *Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹¹³ Kate Millett argues that "[s]he [Lucy] is a pair of eyes watching society; weighing, ridiculing, judging. A piece of furniture whom no one notices, Lucy sees everything and reports, cynically, compassionately, truthfully, analytically" (140). According to Millett, Lucy's keen observation comes from her position as a poor, single, and unattractive woman in "a male-supremacist culture" (203).

Lucy is a spy, indeed any first-person narrator can be defined as a spy.¹¹⁴ The way Lucy describes how she comes to understand the true nature of the *pensionnat* confirms my argument that sees Lucy as an initially naïve observer who comes to see through the appearance only later: “The sensible reader will not suppose that I gained all the knowledge here condensed for his benefit in one month, or in one half-year. No! what I saw at first was the thriving outside of a large and flourishing educational establishment” (91).

Even after she begins to bitterly criticize the system of surveillance, the confessional, and the deprivation of mental authority, Lucy is constantly invited to convert in various ways. Under the command of Père Silas, M. Paul leaves religious tracts in her desk drawer. These tracts, of course, “persuaded to conversion. . . . The Protestant was to turn Papist, not so much in fear of the heretic’s hell, as on account of the comfort, the indulgence, the tenderness Holy Church offered” (518). Yet, since Lucy sees through the fact that Père Silas has manipulated M. Paul into converting her, when she meets M. Paul she is ready to calmly “defend [her] creed and faith in [her] own fashion” and succeeds in making him “feel that Protestants were not necessarily the irreverent Pagans his director [Père Silas] had insinuated” (524). In contrast to the early phase in the religious plot, when she confesses to a priest, Lucy here confesses that the

¹¹⁴ Shuttleworth offers an interesting study in her first chapter “The Art of Surveillance,” which covers Victorian England. She notes that “[s]elfhood no longer resided in the open texture of social act and exchange, but within a new interior space, hidden from view, inaccessible even to the subject’s own consciousness” (9). Gazers, who have professional experience and capacity in reading other’s inner world, assume a new authority. In this sense, “[n]ovelists and physicians took on the mantle of social authority, dedicated to revealing the hidden pathways of social and psychological life (15-16)” Thus, “[s]urveillance and interpretative penetration are not represented . . . as innocent activities” since they reveal the power hierarchy (17). She reads *Villette* in relation to “the mastery of the gaze,” especially Dr. John’s medical surveillance (and thus authority) (17). However, since Graham’s reading of Lucy’s inner world, Ginevra’s worth, and Vashti’s meaning are proved to be misleading, I do not believe the medical surveillance, which is represented by Dr. John, is as important as religious surveillance, or rather the Catholic system of surveillance.

Bible should be “the guide to which [she] looked, and the teacher which [she] owned,” following contemporary anti-Catholic discourse (525). When Lucy professes the Bible as her sole guide, it becomes clear that she will remain a Protestant and the religious plot will become a “non-conversion” one, despite the narrative’s heavy reliance on the pattern of the conversion narrative. Lucy clearly proclaims, “[T]he more I saw of Popery the closer I clung to Protestantism” (528). It is not Lucy who is persuaded to change after this wide-ranging account of conversion attempts. Rather, M. Paul comes to accept Lucy’s religion. He writes, “Remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in you” (616). The religious plot, which begins by following the contemporary conversion narrative, ends with blatant anti-Catholicism, a serious attack on the system of surveillance, and the consequent deprivation of private judgment and slavish subjection of the self.

If the religious plot of *Villette* describes how Lucy comes to understand the Catholic systems of surveillance, confession, and mental slavery and how she resists them by relying on the Protestant antidotes—the Bible and private judgment—the love plot reveals an exactly opposite trajectory. Lucy’s love plot details the movement of her desire from Graham to M. Paul and how, on the way, she “converts” to M. Paul and loses her independence. In her reading of *Villette*, Sally Shuttleworth argues that “[i]t is this ‘abuse of office’ [at a confessional] which Lucy mostly fears: the subjection of the self to a male authority consequent on the revelation of the inner self” (226). This is exactly what happens to Lucy in the love plot. The love plot of *Villette* presents a dire fate for Lucy, since she is not given a chance to hide her inner self to avoid male authority. M. Paul is constantly reading her face and character, allowing her no spiritual or

psychological privacy. He always turns those readings performed against her will to manipulate her to do as he dictates.

Lucy's earlier relationship with Graham, by contrast, preserves the idea of private judgment. Lucy relies on her private judgment to understand Graham until she reaches a conclusion that he is not for her: "Good night, Dr. John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine" (454). She then accepts M. Paul's assertion that they "are alike—there is affinity"—and she was "born under his star" (460, 613). That Lucy relies on her judgment to choose M. Paul is the reason many critics point out that M. Paul is a much better man for Lucy than Graham. For example, Lisa Surridge depicts M. Paul as the only man who understands Lucy's Vashti-like nature. Irene Tayler even argues that M. Paul is a heaven-sent, divine character, who attempts to detach Lucy from worldly love for Graham. By developing the love plot between Lucy and M. Paul, the "better" man, *Villette* challenges the question of male authority from its foundation. The implication is that one man's goodness is not enough to inspire a woman to embrace the patriarchal ideology of the society.¹¹⁵ I challenge the critics who see M. Paul as the good man of the novel and argue that their reading comes from what I call the hegemony of the marriage plot. In the marriage plot spoken through the conversion narrative, M. Paul is not the good man of the novel but a personification of the Roman Catholic Church, who relies on the constant surveillance and control Lucy successfully avoids in the religious plot. Diana Peschier is one of the few critics who note M. Paul's Jesuit-like character: "M. Paul's behaviour conforms to stereotypical Jesuit behaviour in many ways. He feels the need to 'keep Lucy down,' to have her behave almost like a nun. He keeps watch over his prey, ready to pounce at any moment" (151). Having said that, however, Peschier joins other

¹¹⁵ See Surridge 4-14.

critics in praise of M. Paul: “M. Paul, who is arguably even more of a Jesuit than [Madame Beck], conducts a different type of surveillance the aim of which is to help him understand Lucy and to use his knowledge of her to improve and benefit her” (150-51). To call him a good man of the novel even when he uses the ways the novel condemns to win Lucy shows how deeply the hegemony of the marriage plot governs our reading. M. Paul seems to argue that he wants to improve and benefit Lucy. But how would he improve her when he controls Lucy, thinking and making decisions for her? While Lucy seems to choose the right man by using her private judgment, she is little by little subjected to the control of M. Paul and loses her right to have her own opinion. In fact, their relationship begins with M. Paul’s reading of Lucy’s character at Madame Beck’s request:

The little man [M. Paul] fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him.

“I read it,” he pronounced. (81)¹¹⁶

It is very significant that M. Paul’s gaze initiates their relationship at the first meeting, claiming that he sees through Lucy’s appearance. What Shuttleworth argues in her reading of Dr. John’s (that is, Graham’s) character can be aptly applied here: “The rhetoric of unveiling and penetrating the truth, so prevalent in nineteenth-century science, is here located as a discourse of gendered, social power: male science unveils female nature” (220). However, Shuttleworth’s argument should be applied not to Dr. John but to M. Paul since it is M. Paul who reads and looks through Lucy. Dr. John, who, as a

¹¹⁶ As Peschier argues, the scene presents M. Paul as a Jesuit figure and Lucy as a nun. See comments on the preceding quotation in Peschier 151.

doctor, should be an expert in reading the character of a person with a glance, recurrently misreads Lucy from the beginning.

Once “inaugurat[ing] the system of surveillance” by the reading, M. Paul relies on his knowledge of Lucy to goad and to control her (Shuttleworth 223). He mentions his physiognomic reading of her when he forces her to play a role in vaudeville: “Play you must. I will not have you shrink, or frown, or make the prude. I read your skull, that night you came; I see your moyens: play you can; play you must” (164). On the eve of the examination, M. Paul once more mentions his reading to demonstrate that he understands the true Lucy: “I know you! I know you! Other people in this house see you pass, and think that a colourless shadow has gone by. As for me, I scrutinized your face once, and it sufficed” (191). In these early stages of their relationship, however, Lucy tries to contradict M. Paul. When M. Paul states, “I watched you, and saw a passionate ardour for triumph in your physiognomy. What fire shot into the glance!” Lucy attempts to persuade him that his reading was wrong (191). M. Paul, however, still stubbornly believes his first physiognomic reading of Lucy and attempts to persuade her to accept it. Gradually, as the love plot develops, Lucy stops contradicting M. Paul. M. Paul begins to control her with his words and even with his eyes. Lucy “[does] precisely as [she] was bid” in the gallery and, leaving the Cleopatra picture, sits in front of *La vie d’une femme*, the picture M. Paul gives her “la permission” to view (251, 252).¹¹⁷ Lucy still depicts M. Paul as an authoritarian man; she describes M. Paul a “self-elected judge of mine,” who “place[s] me under surveillance,” and the most “waspish little despot,” yet she learns to read his

¹¹⁷ As Valerie Grosvenor Myer points out, “The scene is crucial, for here she is being told what to think, what to feel, and ordered to restrict the use of her own eyes *because* she is a single woman (196; italics in the original).

nonverbal comments, for example, his “sardonic comment [on her pink dress] on which gleamed in his eye” at the concert (376, 377, 277).

After she is ready to confess to the reader that she “did not dislike Professor Emanuel,” Lucy permits us to learn that his way of control has not been limited to the verbal level (432). She has “long known” that he has been following Madame Beck’s (and the Catholic Church’s) system of surveillance: “Now I knew, and had long known, that that hand of M. Emanuel’s was on intimate terms with my desk” (430). More surprisingly, Lucy informs the reader that M. Paul has been not only deciding what type of books she should read but also censoring the chosen books by tearing out pages that he believes are unfit for female eyes. What M. Paul does is the same as Madame Beck’s surveillance, if not worse, in depriving Lucy’s mental independence. M. Paul does not hide the fact. He openly tells Lucy that he and Madame Beck have watched over her. Lucy confesses that “[M. Paul’s] affection had been very sweet and dear,” and this is the only reason given in the novel that explains how and why she is not as offended by his surveillance and control over her as she is by Madame Beck’s (442). Hoeveler and Jadwin provide an insightful and interesting way to read this contradiction. They note that “[t]hough she feels violated by Madame Beck’s probe of her possessions, Lucy seems to appreciate, and even encourage, surveillance from men” and argue that “[t]here are cultural reasons for this apparently illogical double standard. In Western culture, in which a woman’s appearance signals her sexual attractiveness, to be looked at appreciatively and visually objectified by others, especially by men, is an index of a woman’s social power” (Hoeveler and Jadwin 127). Additionally, it is possible that Lucy attempts to avoid female power over her by choosing M. Paul over Madame Beck, thus opting out

from the homosocial surveillance of a powerful woman. The *pensionnat* is an old-time convent, and Lucy's fear of arbitrary female power implicitly touches contemporary Victorians' anxiety over all-controlling female authority within the Anglican sisterhoods, as illustrated, for example, in "Sister Anna's Probation" (1862) by Harriet Martineau. The more she opens herself to M. Paul's surveillance, however, the more she is subjected to male control.

By the end of the novel, Lucy totally loses her independence in the love plot when, in the religious plot, by contrast, she strongly articulates her right to have her own religion and voice. In the religious plot it appears that this "lay Jesuit," a deputy of the Catholic Church whose mission is to convert Lucy, fails to achieve what he aims for (460). In the love plot, however, he does not fail; he is indeed a deputy of the Catholic Church, since he assumes all three negative features of the Catholic Church that are criticized in the novel—surveillance, confession, and the deprivation of mental independence. He becomes Lucy's confessor (it is through the confession that Lucy gets her peace of mind about Justine Marie), who wields his power by surveillance.¹¹⁸ He is, now, Lucy's "king" (607). He not only watches over her but also dictates what she should do. M. Paul assumes the character of an omnipresent God in their last scene; the character aptly fits his last name, Emanuel (God with us). When he states that he was always working for her and thinking about her while he was away, notwithstanding his silence, his image as a caring God attains the final polish, making Lucy's relationship with M. Paul similar to a newly converted person's relationship with God, when the converted

¹¹⁸ See, for example, *Villette* 552.

person, for the first time, truly realizes the meaning of having a caring God.¹¹⁹ Learning that M. Paul has secretly brought a house and prepared it as her school, Lucy is completely overwhelmed by his caring love:

“Ah! you said I [M. Paul] had forgotten you all these weary days,” said he.

“Poor old Emanuel! These are the thanks he gets for trudging about three mortal weeks—from house-painter to upholsterer, from cabinet-maker to charwoman—Lucy and Lucy’s cot, the sole thought in his head!”

I hardly knew what to do. I first caressed the soft velvet on his cuff, and then I stroked the hand it surrounded. It was his foresight, his goodness, his silent, strong, effective goodness, that overpowered me by their proved reality. It was the assurance of his sleepless interest which broke on me like a light from heaven; it was his . . . fond, tender look, which now shook me indescribably. (606-07)

Lucy “describes the torture of suspense, waiting for Paul to come and get her for their interview, a suspense worse than despair, during which she is ‘trusting’ yet at the same time ‘terribly fearing’” (Thaden 103). That Lucy is, “in the midst of [her] trust, terribly fearing” (557) also reflects “Credo quia absurdum” and “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief” logic of the Victorian religious life, which Marianne Thormählen explains as a prevailing religious trope of the time (7).

Lucy’s conversion to M. Paul is done with her conviction that he is an exceptional Catholic who is outside of the evil Catholic system: “All Rome could not put into him bigotry, nor the Propaganda itself make him a real Jesuit. He was born honest, and not false—artless, and not cunning—a freeman, and not a slave” (616). As a convert exalts

¹¹⁹ Barbara Z. Thaden also states that “[Lucy’s] relationship with Paul is like her relationship with God,” although she does not explain why (103).

the Catholic Church after conversion and comes to embrace what the Church teaches without challenging it on any rational basis as he or she did before, Lucy denies that her new religion, M. Paul, who was described as “waspy little despot” earlier in the novel, is the personification of the Catholic Church system of the novel she has severely condemned (377):

He [M. Paul] deemed me born under his star: he seemed to have spread over me its beam like a banner. Once—unknown, and unloved, I held him harsh and strange; the low stature, the wiry make, the angles, the darkness, the manner, displeased me. Now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart—I preferred him before all humanity. (613)

She is no more a free individual: “I [Lucy] pressed it [M. Paul’s hand] close, I paid it tribute. He was my king; royal for me had been that hand’s bounty; to offer homage was both a joy and a duty” (607). As Robert Newsom points out, “[I]t is awfully difficult to see anything in this but a positively slavish abasement before patriarchal authority” when Lucy tells the reader that all through their relationship M. Paul has been controlling her (74): “At this hour, in this house, eighteen months since, had this man at my side, bent before me, looked into my face and eyes, and arbitered my destiny. This very evening he had again stooped, gazed, and decreed. How different the look—how far otherwise the fate! (613).

John Maynard argues that “Lucy . . . finds not conversion to Rome but access to her own nature and psychological powers as she slowly extricates herself from a great set of Catholic religious systems and vestiges” (“The Brontës and Religion” 211). This is

true only in the religious plot, and only when we separate the religious plot from the love plot. In her love trajectory, in her conversion to M. Paul, Lucy ends up being tamed to a stereotyped role of women. Early in the novel, since she does not willingly admit the hard life of a single woman, Lucy is the only female character who does not fit into any “familiar stereotype [of women]: ingenue, coquette, spinster, successful but lonely businesswoman, doting mother, hag” (Hoeveler and Jadwin 116).¹²⁰ Now she finds her place in patriarchal society by submitting to M. Paul’s arbitrary authority that assumes all the evils of the Roman Catholic Church. If M. Paul comes back and marries her, she would be like Paulina, whom Lucy identifies with the dog Sylvie that M. Paul pets while his eyes are occupied with reading a book.

However, Lucy does not let her readers visualize her as a tamed woman who is totally subjected to a man. Even after her conversion to M. Paul, Lucy tries to control her representation to the reader by relying on silence. She still refuses to narrate the ending of her love plot. Not only does she resist telling us about M. Paul’s fate; she confesses that “the three happiest years of [her] life” are when M. Paul is away (614). The implication is that “she is happiest as long as M. Paul Emanuel expresses his love in letters but remains far enough removed to keep from dominating her” (Hoeveler and Jadwin 133). As Hoeveler and Jadwin point out, “*Villette* offers no conventional solution to the problem of being an intelligent, highly emotional woman who has no appropriate role in patriarchy” (108). With a love plot that echoes the discourses of conversion narrative and adopts anti-Catholicism, and with a refusal to end the novel in any traditional way, *Villette* provides a

¹²⁰ Millett also notices Lucy’s refusal of choosing a role her society presents before her: “Looking over all the ‘role models’ her world presents, the adoring mother, the efficient prison matron, the merciless flirt, the baby-goddess, Lucy, whose most genuine trial is that she has been born into a world where there are no adequate figures to imitate so that she is forced to grope her way alone, a pioneer without precedents, turns her back on the bunch of them” (143). Also, see Boumelha 105.

powerful perspective from which to read and to understand the patriarchal concept of love as another tyrant ideology in Victorian England. The novel presents the woman question through the dilemma of Lucy—to maintain her mental independence, she needs to be away from the patriarchic society, yet “without heterosexual romance . . . [her] life seems meaningless” (Hoeveler and Jadwin 125). By relying on the contemporary anti-Catholic sentiment in creating a (pseudo)conversion narrative and by adopting the pattern in the love plot, *Villette* invites the reader to consider the absurdity of blind obedience either to any religious affiliation or to a man, arguably more effectively than in any other contemporary novels on the topic.

That Lucy ends up with a Catholic man, indeed a personification of the Roman Catholic Church, but does not actually convert to that church has more implications when we read *Villette* as a religious novel. As many critics point out, *Villette* poses the woman question, a problem that any intellectual woman might have in a male-dominated society. But *Villette* presents the woman question not by following Lucy’s solitary and sad destiny as a single woman until she finally meets the right man, who, as a man, inevitably casts her back to the patriarchal society. Lucy’s choice is not between an independent, yet solitary life and life as a submissive wife. Rather, *Villette* asks what an intellectual woman can do by equating the ecclesiastical authority of the church and male authority of her society, utilizing the contemporary conversion narrative pattern both in the religious plot and the love plot. Bernstein’s reading of Charlotte’s letter that confesses her “adventure” at a confessional to her sister Emily illustrates that, for women, the problem of resisting authority does not take the source of authority into consideration:

[M]ore notable is her [Charlotte's] negotiation of patriarchal authority again, as in *Villette*. For this incident occasions Brontë's circumvention of the command of both ecclesiastical and domestic fathers. If she prevaricates to escape the threatened domination of the Catholic confessor, she likewise withholds confession of her own transgressive confession from her father, a notoriously dogmatic Anglican curate. (70)

Charlotte's decision to make a sort of confession to her sister, yet hide it from her father ("I think you had better not tell Papa of this"), manifests, of course, her desire to control her confession. Likewise, Lucy tries to maintain power over her story by ending the novel in an ambiguous way. Instead of providing a definite ending in accordance with the religious novel, *Villette* depicts a terrible storm that lasts for seven days around the time of M. Paul's return and then leaves the reader to imagine the ending:

Here pause: pause at once. There is enough said. Trouble no quiet, kind heart; leave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life. (617)

It is widely known that Brontë changed the ending from a tragic death of M. Paul resulting from the storm to this ambiguous one to pacify her father, who did not like a tragic ending. After changing the ending, however, Brontë seems to have preferred it to her previous idea. On several occasions in her letters, she refuses to give any clue in relation to the ending:

The note you sent this morning from Lady Harriette St. Clair is precisely to the same purport <of> as Miss Mulock's request—an application for exact and authentic information respecting the fate of M. Paul Emanuel!! . . . I had a letter the other day announcing that a lady of some note who had always determined that whenever she married, her elect should be the counterpart of Mr. Knightley in Miss Austen's "Emma"—had now changed her mind and vowed that she would either find the duplicate of Professor Emanuel or remain forever single!!!

I have sent Lady Harriette an answer so worded as to leave the matter pretty much where it was. Since the little puzzle amuses the <lady> 'ladies' it would be a pity to spoil their sport by giving them the key. (Brontë, *Letters* 3: 138-39)¹²¹

What makes this letter much more intriguing is the note Brontë received from a lady who changed her imaginary lover from Mr. Knightley to M. Paul. I have argued that *Villette* heavily relies on the contemporary religious conversion narrative and overlays it with the love plot. It is very significant that one of the earliest converts *Villette* earns is one within the marriage plot, who, along with Lucy, explicitly acknowledges her conversion to M. Paul. *Villette*, indeed, succeeds in presenting the religious conversion narrative and the marriage plot as interchangeable.

Three days later, in her letter to her publisher, George Smith, on 26 March 1853, Brontë also avoids giving any clue to what she means by the ending:

With regard to that momentous point—M. Paul's fate—in case any one in future should request to be enlightened thereon—they may be told that it was designed that every reader should settle the catastrophe for himself, according to

¹²¹ When I quote any of Brontë's letters, I kept the original editing marks and punctuation/spelling errors.

the quality of his disposition, the tender or remorseless impulse of his nature.

‘drowning and Matrimony are the fearful alternative’ The Merciful . . . will of course choose the former and milder doom—drown him to put him out of pain.

The cruel-hearted will on the contrary pitilessly impale him on the second horn of the dilemma—marrying him without ruth or compunction to that—person—that—that—individual—“Lucy Snowe.” (Brontë, *Letters* 3: 142)

Brontë’s letter also suggests that ending a novel with a marriage plot is, in fact, not a less tragic conclusion. As stated above, in the tradition of the religious novel, a happy marriage at the end of *Villette* should indicate that the conversion within the novel is approved. By not giving final approval while following the religious novel tradition, *Villette* leads the reader to view marriage in a way rather different from that which typical religious novels usually present.

I have already indicated that, as the century advanced and as religious novels became a more popular genre, the earlier decades’ most popular narrative form, namely the marriage/courtship plot, was increasingly replaced by the postmarriage plot. Set in the tradition of the religious novel, *Villette* marks its place in the transitional stage with its open ending. Additionally, taken as a religious novel, *Villette* resists the reader’s anticipation in several ways with its repeated structure. Its borrowed narrative style, the Catholic conversion narrative, follows the pattern of the contemporary conversion narrative only to frustrate its reader’s expectation by twisting the novel as an anti-Catholic nonconversion narrative. Then, it repeats the structure of the conversion narrative in the love plot only to resist the well-known device of ending a conversion narrative with a story about successful or doomed marriage (life). Religious marriage-plot

novels, while helping to set women free from their husband's secular authority by applauding wives' heroic decisions to seek a "true" Church and to leave their husbands, also reinforced the institution of marriage by using it as a way to approve or denounce a fictional conversion. *Villette* seems to challenge these ambiguous attitudes toward marriage in its strange conversion narrative. It relies on and eventually rewrites the conversion narrative to ask its reader to reevaluate the authority of religion that traditionally defined women's proper sphere and institutionalized marriage. The process of the secularization of Victorian religion, at least in the world of fiction, seems to have started when it embraced the marriage plot to propagandize its religious teachings. Religious novels succeed in attracting readers and teach their diverse religious positions more easily by relying on the marriage plot, one of the most familiar plot lines of the Victorian period, and eventually developing it into the postmarriage plot. As more and more of such novels were written and read, and as the century of religious skepticism went on, theological issues gradually disappeared in the novels, leaving more sophisticated and detailed marriage/postmarriage plots for the readers. One of the most important contributions of the religious marriage plot is, ironically, that it serves to disguise or sometimes even erase complicated theological issues, leaving, instead, the reader to have a capacity to imagine the postmarriage plot apart from religious teachings.

Chapter 4

After “Happily Ever After”:

The Journey from the Marriage Plot to the Postmarriage Plot

The previous chapter claims that one of the greatest legacies of the Victorian religious novel is that it takes the “nonnarratable” of the traditional marriage/courtship plot—namely the marriage of the protagonist—and turns it into the “narratable” by beginning to imagine an afterlife for that plot. As the religious novel became a prolific and widely consumed genre, the earlier decades’ trendy marriage plot—“the novelist’s great weapon” as “the solution of all difficulties” —was increasingly replaced by what I am calling the postmarriage plot (“Belles Lettres” 272). Among the 121 religious novels in Wolff’s NOFAD series, approximately 70 novels are the marriage-plot novels and 50 novels continue their stories beyond marriage.¹²² Both marriage- plot and postmarriage-plot novels appear throughout the century: the marriage-plot novels from 1823 to around 1900; the postmarriage plot novels from 1842 to 1900. Out of 121 novels in the NOFAD series, there is no novel that pays close attention to the married life of protagonists among

¹²² These rounded numbers include about twenty novels that feature both the marriage and postmarriage plots of main characters. Some novels in the series do not include either the marriage plot or the postmarriage plot. These are mostly children’s books (for example, *Eric, or, Little by Little* [1858], *Jessica’s First Prayer* [1867], or *Pilgrim Street* [1872]) or Catholic conversion plot novels with protagonists who become nuns or monks (*Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert* [1848], *The Triumph of Failure* [1899], or *Sister Teresa* [1901]). Additionally, novels that resemble tracts with strongly didactic messages do not generally include any courtship plot. For instance, *Church Clavering; or, The Schoolmaster* (1843) is so occupied with how the national education should be conducted that it does not have any other subplot. Likewise, while *Falsehood and Truth* (1841) features the Roberts family as main characters, it does not describe family life in detail but concentrates on their reading and interpretation of the Bible and on anti-Catholic themes.

the ones published before 1840.¹²³ The situation changes somewhat dramatically after 1840 for all 50 postmarriage novels appear after that year.

One reason for the development of the postmarriage plot can be found in the genre's reliance on what we have been calling "answering" or "response" novels. When a religious novel ended with a happy marriage to support the author's religious position, another author with an opposing religious position could simply intervene in the religious debate by describing the wretched marital life of the couple who were so triumphantly married at the close of the original novel. What comes after the marriage vow became a significant indicator of the religious position of the author, and the representation of marital life began to occupy the central part of religious novels. For example, while *Father Clement; A Roman Catholic Story* by Grace Kennedy (1823) relies on the marriage plot to attack the Catholic Church, its answering novel, *Father Oswald; A Genuine Catholic Story* (1842), depends on the postmarriage plot to defend its anonymous author's pro-Catholic position.¹²⁴ In the preface to *Father Oswald*, its author

¹²³ The only exception is Gresley's *Portrait of an English Churchman*, which appeared in 1838. However, although Ridley's marriage proposal appears in a chapter titled "An Interesting Episode in a Churchman's Life" in the middle of the novel, and although Ridley and Mary, Herbert's sister, marry soon, the novel does not actually describe the married life of the couple. As mentioned in chapter 2, each chapter in the novel gives a lesson on a Christian's life, and Ridley and Mary's marriage gives Herbert chances to talk about a Christian couple's duty and infantile baptism.

¹²⁴ While Wolff mentions that *Father Oswald; A Genuine Catholic Story* is written by "an anonymous Catholic," some websites, such as *OnRead.com* and *eBooksRead.com*, name William Hickling Prescott as the author (Wolff 34; "William Hickling Prescott," *OnRead.com*). If these websites are correct, the novel is an American religious novel, rather than an English one, since Prescott is an American historian who was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1796. On the other hand, *OnRead.com* is not generally rated as a reliable site, for it lists books that still remain under copyright and the website claims that "[a]ll materials presented on this site are available for the distribution over the Internet in accordance with the license of the Russian Organization for multimedia and Digital Systems (ROMS)" ("Terms of Service," *OnRead.com*), meaning that it does not necessarily follow international copyright laws. One of the reviewers of this website succinctly summarizes reasons for not trusting this site: "Russian terms of service. Protected by a Chinese domain that is registered from France. 'Book' downloads that come with an .exe extension that installs and directs you to another website" (jlmwrite, "OnRead.com, is it safe?"). Because of the website's unreliable nature, I would not venture to name Prescott as the author of *Father Oswald*. The novel was published in London by Charles Dolman in 1842, not in America. Furthermore, Prescott is a Unitarian, not a Catholic:

overtly declares its connection to the earlier novel: “Having observed with much pain, several years ago, the harm done against the truth by the publication of ‘Father Clement’ and many similar productions, I was induced, at the instances of a much and highly-respected friend, to sketch the following story” (v). The novel focuses on the marital life of the novel’s protagonists, Edward and Emma Seftons, linking it to the further development of their religious positions. The wife, Emma, converts to the Roman Catholic Church in defiance of her husband, but the anonymous author rewards Emma’s conversion as it initiates Edward’s own long journey toward the Catholic Church, eventually reuniting them in belief happily ever after.

This chapter delves into the relationship between marriage and postmarriage plots in the VRN. Given the popularity of the marriage-plot genre in the Victorian period, the earlier religious novel’s borrowing of the form is predictable. But how did the combination flourish? What made the union of the marriage plot and the religious novel so fruitful? What does it mean that marriage occupies so central a place in the religious novel, a spiritual bildungsroman? How should we read marriage in relation to one’s spiritual growth? Is domesticity the enemy of one’s spiritual freedom? Can or must a life companion help a person on a spiritual journey? Finally, how did answers to these questions affect real Victorian women?

The introduction of the marriage plot to the religious-novel genre reveals numerous cultural assumptions of the Victorian age. That marriage is the almost unanimous reward of choosing the “right” religious denomination indicates that marriage is generally accepted or at least recognized as a prize. Joseph Boone states that “in both

“Theologically, therefore, he confirmed his belief in that more liberal form of Unitarianism in which he had been reared” (Ogden 195). Also see Peck 106.

Victorian life and conventional literature, loving marriage and harmonious family life were increasingly idealized as the *one* inviolable certitude, the one unchanging center, of happy existence” in a rapidly industrializing and thus unstable society (69; italics in the original). Boone notes, of course, that there is a wide gap between the novelistic marriage and the realities of marital life in the Victorian (or any other) age. According to Boone, “pessimistic wedlock themes,” the term he uses for negative versions of the postmarriage plot, appear only after the 1860s and 1870s (72). Boone goes on to argue that while the earlier “pessimistic wedlock themes” tend to blame individuals for their marital failures, as seen in the American example of William Dean Howell’s *A Modern Instance* (1882), later novels of the twentieth century critique the institution of marriage itself: “Yet despite Howells’s realistic assessment of the illusions underlying the couple’s initial attraction, he fixes the blame on their individual failures to perceive the truth of their situation in time to remedy it, rather than calling into doubt the values lying behind the romantic ideal of marriage itself” (73).

Religious novels’ adaptation of the marriage plot and its development of the postmarriage plot complicate Boone’s argument and his chronology. First of all, religious novels recorded “pessimistic wedlock themes” far earlier than Boone suggests. The first example of the postmarriage plot appeared in the late 1830s in a crude form, and religious novels published throughout the 1840s frequently focus on postmarriage problems. Although Boone seems to suggest that “pessimistic wedlock themes” function to criticize marriage by presenting unhappy marital life, postmarriage-plot novels are by no means intentionally critical of marriage. Marriage is a way of approving the religious position of a protagonist in marriage-plot novels, and the trope of marriage as a reward continues in

the response genre of the postmarriage-plot novel. As the following sections will show, it is only quite unexpectedly that postmarriage-plot novels came to play important roles in criticizing marriage. Failed marital relationships cannot be simply explained as immature individuals' mistaken choices when we take seriously the role of characters' religious ideals. When Boone laments that *A Modern Instance* fails to draw the reader's attention to the problems of marriage as an institution by placing the blame for the failed marriage on characters' personal shortcomings and wrong expectations, Boone simply overlooks the role of another dominant institution, religion, that has taught people to follow certain ideals. Because he excludes religion in his reading of the postmarriage-plot novels, he misses a chance to witness the unexpected and intriguing process of one institution helping to undermine the other.¹²⁵

As more and more postmarriage-plot religious novels were produced, marriage and its components—family life, gender-specific roles within family structure, and the power relationship within the family—were increasingly scrutinized in the religious novel, and somewhat unexpectedly, these elements of the marital life began to receive serious blows. As Jacques Derrida notes in *Acts of Literature*, when literature allows one to say everything in every way, things that are talked about begin to undermine dogmatic paradigms: “To say everything is no doubt to gather, by translating, all figures into one another, to totalize by formalizing, but to say everything is also to break out of [*franchir*] prohibitions. To *affranchise oneself* [*s’affranchir*]*—in every field where law can lay down the law. The law of literature tends, in principle, to defy or lift the law. . . . It is an institution which tends to overflow the institution*” (36; italics in the original). Fictional

¹²⁵ While Boone is surprised to find that one of Howells's main characters decides to become a minister after an almost blasphemous life, this type of sudden conversion is very common in postmarriage-plot religious novels.

discourse on marriage promoted people's awareness regarding possible wrongs of marital life, allowing people to look at marital concerns in a critical way and to question what had been generally accepted until that time. In the above mentioned example, Emma in *Father Oswald* challenges the custom of the time that dictates that she follow her husband's religious opinions when she converts to the Roman Catholic Church. While the wife in F. W. Robinson's *High Church* (1860) loses her husband and eventually her life when she defies her husband and converts to the High Church, the anonymous author of *Father Oswald* richly rewards Emma's conversion—which is deemed unwifely by Robinson's novel—by promising a happy marital life for her. Looking at postmarriage-plot religious novels lets us identify modifications in gender relations and family structure that might carry over into a real-life family.

By providing educational plots for both men and women, postmarriage plot religious novels can be relatively egalitarian when it comes to gender. In a society where women were supposed to accept their husband's religious positions, some Protestant teachers, citing the principle of private judgment, taught women that they were responsible for their own souls. I would hesitate, however, before calling these novels—and the genre to which they belong—feminist. Religious novels are not feminism-friendly by themselves. Particular episodes in them might appear to strongly support feminist reading of these novels, yet I contend against such practice of interpretation. Eventually, while discussing religious issues in relation to the marital life, the genre comes to help promote women's rights, but I am opposed to the reading practice that exclusively highlights the women's question out of any religious novel because that is simply not the main concern of the genre.

Women in postmarriage-plot religious novels are often depicted as both financially and legally independent of their fathers and husbands in defiance of the doctrine of coverture, the doctrine William Blackstone famously defines as follows:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband. . . . Upon this principle, of a union of person in husband and wife, depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities, that either of them acquire by the marriage. (441-42)

The fact that women's independence, both spiritual and financial, is discussed in religious novels at all makes a huge difference in the history of the women's rights movement.

However, for each religious novel, what is at stake is the religious position of the novel rather than the problem of women's independence. Hence, when virtually the same act is condemned in one novel and praised in another, this contrary reaction signifies not each author's political perspective on a particular gendered act but his or her religious position, as we have seen in case of *Father Oswald* and *High Church*. In fact, many religious novels with a postmarriage plot often leave the question of women's independence open at the end of the novel by listing gains and losses of the female protagonist and then by asking the readers to judge for themselves. In other words, these novels provide female characters with wealth and legal rights, not because they support female independence but because these devices help the writers deliver their religious messages more effectively.

The contradictions I have outlined make for some complex representation of gender issues. Despite her widely known antifeminism, Eliza Lynn Linton allows

Hermione Fullerton, her main character in *Under Which Lord?* (1879), to possess her own property, which even her marriage cannot take away from her.¹²⁶ It is almost impossible to read Hermione's property as "pin money" in the novel since the main plot depends on Hermione's ability to reclaim the property at any moment from her husband, Richard. Her High Church vicar persuades her to do so by averring that it is her duty as a Christian to take property back from her atheist husband. As a result, Richard becomes a struggling lecturer at a London institution after Hermione virtually evicts him from home for his "atheism."¹²⁷ To suggest that Linton bestows on Hermione this exceptional and unreal financial freedom in order to attack the feminist cause is to commit the authorial intention fallacy. Linton ends *Under Which Lord?* with a calculus of loss and gain rather than with direct criticism of one side or the other: "And now to reckon up the loss and gain of this tragic barter. For herself she had lost husband, child, money, place, and the finest flavour of her womanly repute. But she had gained the blessing of the Church" (3: 304-05). Linton's religious novel does not reflect her professed political beliefs; rather, while she criticizes the High Church and its policies such as auricular confession, Anglican sisterhood, and emphasis on church authority, she delves into the question of an individual's spiritual responsibility in relation to women's subjugated roles in the family. The church of the novel is criticized as "the Church which denies science, asserts impossibilities, and refuses to admit the evidence of facts," but Hermione's sincerity in

¹²⁶ As "the first woman journalist in England to draw a fixed salary" as early as in 1848, Linton was a radical writer who led her life according to her ideas of women's rights in her earlier career (Anderson, "Linton, Elizabeth [Eliza] Lynn"). While she remained independent journalist, however, she becomes increasingly conservative in her opinions and later highly critical on the New Women movement, especially in the late 1860s and the 1870s as we can see in her articles from *Saturday Review*.

¹²⁷ While the narrator introduced Richard at the beginning of the novel as a self-proclaimed agnostic ("agnostic he called himself; infidel he was called by others" [1: 14]), after the vicar equates agnostic to atheist ("Mr. Fullerton? a confessed Agnostic—in other words an Atheist?" [2: 55]), Richard is referred to and condemned as an atheist.

seeking her spiritual salvation throughout the novel makes a simple answer to the calculus rather difficult (3: 305).¹²⁸

This chapter attempts to provide a holistic reading of the religious-novel genre. To do so, I begin with a detailed definition of the postmarriage plot. Before I turn to the development of the postmarriage plot within the genre of religious novel, I give a brief overview of the Victorian understanding of marital life, family structure, and domesticity in order to see how religious novels rely on, play with, or twist these notions. Earlier parts of section 2 provide close readings of several religious novels concentrating on Eliza Linton's *Under Which Lord?* (1879) and Charlotte M. Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), to illustrate different possible understandings of marital life, family structure, power relation within the family, the education plot, and married women's duties and roles. Close readings of these novels reveal the impact of the introduction of the postmarriage-plot religious novel on the Victorian literary landscape. The last part in this section discusses Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888), a Victorian bestseller that sold "70,000 copies within the first three years in England alone," as an example of the development of the postmarriage-education plot (Wolff 457). The chapter concludes with George Eliot's *Middlemarch* as a case of a major Victorian novel that clearly illustrates the religious novel's influence on other more secular novels. With its acclaimed realism and more "secular" representation of the marital life, *Middlemarch* will provide a valued assessment of the influence of the religious novel.

While this chapter does not argue that fictional discussions of alternatives to marital injustice are unproblematically translated into real-life attitudes, customs, or

¹²⁸ While *Under Which Lord?* highly criticizes the High Church party, Linton was an agnostic and did not take part in any affiliation in her life after she had lost her faith.

legislation, I nevertheless contend that literary discussions and imaginative alternatives eventually help to produce different understanding of marital life. Recent scholarship draws our attention to the paradigm-shifting power of fictional narratives, although it tends to focus on sensational novels. Marlene Tromp declares that “the progressive rewriting of this genre offered up a critique of contemporary constructions of gender and marital violence” (*Private Rod* 14). Likewise, Jennifer Hedgecock argues that “the construction of the femme fatale offers an empowering new image of midcentury Victorian women, challenging reader's dominant ideologies about women's roles” (15). If, as Derrida puts it, literature opens up possibilities of talking about “everything,” which genre of literature would be more able to bring forward unrepresentable elements of marital life than sensational novels and, I argue, religious novels? Sensational novels by definition and religious novels by their propagandistic natures obtain sanction to open up generically repressed components of marital life. Tromp claims that “the political-legal debates of the era” contributed to the birth of the sensational fiction genre and the sensational fiction, in turn, “participated in, shaped, and was shaped by” them (*Private Rod* 71).¹²⁹ Religious debates of the Victorian era led numerous writers to present important issues to make the genre visible, and the genre then helped to shape cultural realities. These newly developed subjects are often reflected in more realistic novels and other genres for, as Tromp also points out, the boundary between sensation and realism is very often destabilized and blurry. We have already seen in chapter 2 that Victorian genre differences are not as firmly demarcated as twentieth-century literary critics tend to assume.

¹²⁹ For more, see chapter 2.

The Postmarriage Plot

As I define it, the postmarriage plot of the religious novel is more than a subplot about married couples. For the postmarriage plot to be activated, a couple's married life should be a main concern of the plot, and the couple must either be already married at the beginning of the novel or marry in the first few chapters. The couple's experiences *as* a couple must generate the main plot of the novel. In contrast to the marriage plot, marriage in the postmarriage religious novel is often figured as a trial, as the title of Emma Jane Worboise's (Mrs. Guyton's) novel *The Wife's Trials: a Tale* suggests. Problems in marital life come in many forms, of course, but these dormant crises burgeon when the couple takes opposite religious positions. In these marital trials, husband and wife differ in their approaches to the problems; one member of the couple, usually the wife, comes to rely on religion in the midst of marital turmoil. The introduction of religious difference, however, only aggravates the couple's relationship until the other comes to accept the same religious position that is chosen by his or her spouse. This is the euphoric marriage plot; there is, of course, a dysphoric version as well, in which one member of the couple refuses to accept his or her spouse's religious position.

Education that leads to true maturity and genuine marital happiness starts with these crises. Both the wife and the husband have to reform their relationship with each other and revise their viewpoints and lifestyles. This brings us to another important distinction between the marriage plot and the postmarriage plot: the postmarriage plot puts a man in the same position as a woman in terms of his religious life. While the marriage plot pays more attention to a series of educational events experienced by a heroine, the postmarriage plot presents both man and wife as having full responsibility

for their religious lives and an equal opportunity to become wiser at the end. If the marriage plot is most often a girl's bildungsroman that records a girl's growing up until she reaches her early womanhood, the postmarriage plot of the religious novel records how both of these naïve and childish lovers attain maturity by (re)finding, or relying on, sincere belief in the course of various marital trials.¹³⁰ Even when they fail, the couple learns valuable lessons by the end for the benefit of the reader. The postmarriage plot generally represents the education plot as a process, most often employing contemporaneous instead of retrospective narration. When a novel presents a character who recalls his or her miserable married life and its relation to religious life, as in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and *Ellen Middleton*, it relies on intimate subgenres such as the diary, the letter, and confession.¹³¹

Domestic religious conflict helps to bring forth a serious debate about the issue of women's independence, leading to new understandings about marriage, family structure, and, most of all, marital relationship. In a society where a woman was supposed to automatically follow her father's religious position before her marriage and her husband's after, the fact that such war could be waged meant a lot. Susan P. Casteras, Susan M. Griffin, and Miriam Elizabeth Burstein, in their respective studies, draw our attention to what lies at the core of many religious controversies, namely, a question of women's autonomy.¹³² Protestantism's emphasis, after all, lies on individual responsibility for salvation, and this teaching provides lots of fictional female characters with spiritual autonomy. Some religious novels are quick to take this individual

¹³⁰ *The Wife's Trials* and Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* are good examples.

¹³¹ It is, of course, arguable whether *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a religious novel, but I argue that it is; at least, it is undeniable that it definitely borrows tropes and patterns from the genre.

¹³² Casteras's study is about the Anglican sisterhood, Griffins's is about anti-Catholic novels, and Burstein's is about the Jewish and Catholic religious novels.

responsibility in spiritual matters as the axis of the novel and bend Victorian legal reality to fit into this device. Female characters in these novels appear to enjoy extensive legal freedoms; they inherit and control money independent of their husbands' authority, and some even can pursue separation against their husband's wishes. Lots of them also leave their husbands with impunity.

Why did the amalgam of the religious plot and the marriage plot beget a new postmarriage religious plot? Rachel Ablow's *The Marriage of Minds* provides an important clue to this question. Ablow points out that in the midst of the debates regarding marriage-related legislation such as the Custody of Infants Bill (1839), the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), and the Married Women's Property Act (1870), "coverture was often conflated or confused with several other popular notions of what it means for two people to come together: the Christian notion of husband and wife constituting 'one flesh'; the Platonic notion of soul-mates as two halves of a single being; and domestic ideologists' claims regarding husbands' and wives' sympathetic bond" (10-11). The coverture could be extended analogically to the relationship between a convert and his or her new religious position. For some, their acceptance of a religious affiliation made them one with the chosen sect, as if they became one flesh. For others, especially converts like Charles Reding in *Loss and Gain*, their recently embraced sects felt like their long-lost home, their counterpart that finally allowed them to become a whole self. For still others, religious affiliation completely subsumed their identities and governed and directed their ways of life. Given that these notions were pervasive in the Victorian period, it was quite natural that religious identity was appropriately well expressed initially through the marriage plot and then through the postmarriage plot.

The short prefix, “post-,” thus actually indicates a significantly different approach to tensions and problems presented in a novel. Marriage in the marriage plot novels is depicted as the final happy goal, the ultimate resolution of all the problems of the novel. Marriage in the postmarriage plot religious novel begins to undermine this happy assumption. Again, in the marriage plot, marriage to the right suitor is a happy resolution of all these issues and conflicts, whereas in the religious novel’s postmarriage plot, only a proper religious conversion has such a redeeming power. Proof of the rightness of that conversion lies in a happy married life. The anticipated event of a postmarriage-plot novel thus shifts from marriage to conversion, and marital life and its components become the main concern as a result. Presenting the marital life of a couple, the postmarriage plot inevitably reveals hitherto unthought-of sides of the marriage, namely, a potential change in the power relationship within the family, the meaning of the marriage, and the fallibility of male authority, to name only a few.

Man and Wife in Victorian Religious Novels

Since promising a happy marital life to the rightful convert appears to reinforce patriarchy, both the marriage plot and the postmarriage plot seem to idealize patriarchal family life. After all, regardless of their religious positions, most religious novels intimate the upcoming crisis of the novel by showing a hitherto seemingly strong family tie beginning to be torn apart as one or more family members take up a religious position. This section looks at how *Under Which Lord?*, *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and *Robert Elsmere* explore family life and family politics under the pressure of religious differences. Being Victorian novels, of course, all three feature stereotypically good

women, some of whom are punished for daring to leave the proper realm of domesticity. However, to dismiss these novels by saying that they reinforce patriarchal ideology is to overlook the cultural possibilities they open up at the center of their plots. Performative textual acts, as I call them, allow the reader to go beyond a simple transgression/reinforcement debate; with their representation, we listen for the cultural resonance of possible change in marital life: equal opportunities, financial freedom, and public life for married women. At the same time, it is worthwhile to emphasize one more time that disclosure is not the main aim of the religious novels. These novelists probably never thought of exposing the double standard or uneven opportunities for women. However, the repeated breach, or rather bending, of reality in the imaginative world of these novels makes them active renovators of the Victorian cultural landscape. As Barbara Leah Harman succinctly states, “Novelists, after all, are both participants in, and fabricators of, their worlds” (8).

High Church and Under Which Lord?: Family Power Relations

Katherine Sobba Green states that the courtship novel, her name for the marriage-plot novel, “began with the heroine’s coming out and ended with her wedding” (2). For Green, because a marriage-plot novel was usually written from “a woman’s point of view” and focused on this relatively independent phase in a woman’s life, “the novel of courtship appropriated domestic fiction to feminist purposes” (2):

By creating a feminized space—that is, by centering its story in the brief period of autonomy between a young woman’s coming out and her marriage—this subgenre fostered heightened awareness of sexual politics within the gendered

arena of language, especially with regard to defining male and female spheres of action. (2-3)

While Green's revisionist reading of the marriage plot novel seems to pose several questions regarding women's supposed "autonomy" between her "coming out" and "her wedding," her argument makes better sense if the marriage plot of a heroine is read alongside the religious plot. The heroine in the Protestant religious marriage-plot novel is able to assume power not because she reaches a certain age but because she, just like her father or brother, borrows her authority from higher sources, from God and her Bible. In contrast to the marriage plot, the heroine does not need to relinquish her power to her husband even after she marries since she is still considered responsible for her soul. She might be legally invisible under coverture, but as a spiritual being she cannot simply disappear. She is still expected to obey her husband, but what if she concludes that her husband's spiritual guidance does not lead her to behavior that is in her soul's best interest? If she resists obeying her husband, her behavior might be negatively interpreted by the law of coverture. According to the law of Protestant individualism, however, her action is highly praiseworthy. Applying a different lens to interpret the same action naturally causes more conflicts and misunderstandings in postmarriage-plot religious novels, and wife and husband (and their respective supporters) seem to be unable to untangle the complex logics inherent in these different approaches—one legal and traditional, and the other Protestant and spiritual. Postmarriage religious novels provide the reader with a valuable chance to reconsider marriage and its related issues by leading the reader beyond the limit of the marriage plot that depicts marriage as the ultimate answer to all conflicts.

Frederick William Robinson's *High Church* provides an excellent example for such reading in an explosive marital quarrel between Martin and Ada Chester that ends with a separation. At the end of the fight described in an early part of the novel, Martin detains Ada by force and exclaims, "It has come to a struggle between you and me for mastery" (1: 265). To the husband, "mastery," will to power, is the dark reason behind his wife's refusal of complete obedience. But mastery of and for what? The fight is initiated by Ada's auricular confession to a young and handsome High Church curate, Geoffrey Stone, and her insistence on the propriety of this act. Ada and Martin become estranged when Ada openly defies Martin's wish that she stay away from their church for one fatal day. Martin fears that there will be a riot on that day and that it will have a possible impact on Ada's sensitive nature, but Ada follows Martin to the church without any escort when she realizes that Martin has left without her. Although Ada tells Martin, "I must not neglect my duty to my God on account of your fear for myself," for Martin, this overt defiance means that she opts for her curate's teaching against her husband's will (1: 183). For Martin, Ada's arguments are only an echo of Geoffrey's words. After this event Martin and Ada do not speak to each other much; feeling that she is wrongfully neglected, Ada turns to Geoffrey in the confessional.

She is discovered—alone with the curate, seated on a low stool at his feet—by Martin's business partner and church warden, Mr. Grimley, who bursts into the room and demands an explanation. What is interesting in this scene that covers several chapters is the extremely gendered interpretation regarding the meaning of the event. Mr. Grimley and Martin instantly treat Ada as if she has been caught red-handed in an adulterous affair. All the men in the novel—even, I argue, the masculine narrative voice—seem to

have no problem reading the scene as a marital transgression; even Geoffrey is aware of this possible reading although he disdains to accept so degrading an interpretation.¹³³

Chapter 3 looked at some of the ways gendered power inequities played out in Victorian representations of confession. Confessors wield power over confessants because, by the act of confession, confessants virtually admit their transgressions against their society's norms and rules, and confessors represent society at the moment of confession. This power also comes from the confessors' authority to decide the nature of what is confessed. Martin's accusation of Ada on the basis of his interpretation of the scene is nothing but his assertion of his power over her. Martin appears to equate the role of a husband to that of a confessor. His reading of and reaction to the scene are assertions of his role as a confessor, as though his legal power over Ada also guarantees his spiritual power over her. Martin automatically assumes the role of confessor and demands a confession from Ada, even though she refuses to act the role of a confessant. Reading Ada's confession to Geoffrey as the manifestation of her deliberate wish to leave his authority, Martin is predictably furious and adamantly demands Ada's full repentance.

To Ada, however, her confession to Geoffrey and subsequent defiance to her husband's authority means a completely different thing. She combats a masculine, sexualized, and ultimately secular interpretation of the event by reframing it in spiritual terms and by invoking an authority beyond the secular. Shortly before following Martin to the church on the riot night, she reasons to herself that "[s]he had vowed to love,

¹³³ The narrator of *High Church* assumes a male voice: "[T]he writer of this tale must mind what he is about, lest he offend a large portion of his constituents by claiming sympathy for Martin. . . . Still, I must say Martin had fair ground for complaint. . . . [W]e express ourselves very forcibly sometimes to our sisters and wives. They may not go to confession, and their confessor may not be a handsome young man of three or four and thirty; but we can still be ungenerous in matters of less moment, and 'rap out' pretty strong if needful" (1: 269-70).

honour and obey him [Martin], and she would obey him in all else but that which seemed to her like turning traitor to God" (1: 186). In short, Martin reads the event under the British legal system, under the laws of "converture" that places the wife entirely under her husband's rule; Ada reads it through the Protestant teachings of spiritual autonomy.

Interestingly enough, the narrator assumes that this disturbingly gendered analysis is not confined to the fictional characters either:

Who is in the wrong, gentlest and acutest of readers—this firm man, or this poor woman? Who has the greater right to his or her own way, and who sees through the glass more darkly, and will have none of the light of truth to assist. I would not sow dissension among novel readers, though this be a novel written with a purpose, written in the vain hope of doing a little good, and, mayhap, founded—for who knows where these "writing fellows" obtain their materials?—on some glimpses of a real home tragedy akin to this. I would not sow dissension amongst novel readers, I say, though I fear the masculine portion who may favour me by a perusal of this story will side with Martin Chester, as assuredly the ladies will with the object of his jealous sternness. (1: 268-69)

That Martin takes Ada's act as a betrayal of fidelity, something very close to an adulterous affair, is quite clear from his exclamation: "[Y]ou confessed what should have been sacred between us to a third party—a young man—one, against whom I was already prejudiced. You *confessed* to him!" (1: 264; italics in the original). The novel was published in 1860, three years after the passage of the Divorce Act. Before 1857, and in real life, Martin would have been able to sue Ada in court for criminal conversation, even without Ada's awareness. Despite this epochal change in the history of marriage,

however, it was still a very complicated process for an average middle-class couple to pursue a divorce in court. Instead, Martin lets Ada choose between a permanent separation and complete submission. For Ada, to submit means to accept that she has transgressed, although it might restore at least part of her marital happiness. She refuses to give in. To say yes means she accepts Martin and Mr. Grimley's interpretation of the event. Ada chooses to say no. She, indeed, does not seem to have a choice here—a faultless character being her best asset, Ada knows that “after that assent every action would be jealously watched, and distrust would only gather strength, not die” (1: 276).

With the advent of the postmarriage plot, abstract religious matters and theological disputes hitherto discussed and debated outside of the domestic sphere now encroached on the hearth. Taken together, religious issues and unequal relationships weaken marriage, precisely the entity that both religious and legal institutions are invested with keeping intact. Genesis 2.24 commands, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh,” and Matthew 19:6 repeats the same “one flesh” logic, denouncing divorce: “[T]hey [husband and wife] are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” These verses have been frequently quoted to sanctify antidiivorce law and became the foundation for coverture. In the age of religious debates, spiritual individualism daringly challenged this “one flesh” logic, urging each person to work for his or her salvation. The husband's representation of the couple that had been controversially held up in legal sense until 1870, failed utterly when it came to a matter of religious conscience.

Subjugation of the wife to the husband was, of course, linked to her assumed economic dependence. What happened if the wife was financially independent? In other words, what happened if a wealthy wife was taught the doctrine of individual salvation? This is the case study which is imagined in *Under Which Lord?* At the beginning of the novel, “[y]oung, exceptionally beautiful, amiable, wealthy” Hermione Fullerton, the seventeen-year-old, rich heiress of Crossholme Abbey “[who was] entitled to look among the aristocracy,” is in love with Richard Spence, a twenty-one-year-old lieutenant in the army (1: 2). Reluctantly indulging his daughter’s wish to marry Richard, Hermione’s father makes a settlement to make “things safe for his daughter and unpleasant for the man of her choice”: “Every farthing of her own fortune, inherited from her mother, was settled on herself: and . . . he [Richard] had not even a life-interest in any part of the property; and if his wife died before him all went to her children; or, failing these, to her next of kin” (1: 3, 3-4). The partial father does not stop here. He leaves a will that seals Richard’s dependent status for ever, making the couple take his family name, Fullerton; assigning Hermione the status of his sole heiress; and denying any benefit to Richard. Hermione’s property is solely in her own hands, in defiance of the Victorian marital law that does not recognize a wife’s separate property and consigns the legal right of any income or inheritance she might have earned or inherited during the marriage to her husband. Neither is her property not under a trust, which is an aristocratic way to secure a wife’s separate property not claimable by her husband, because a trust does not allow the wife herself access her property without appealing to a court of equity. Still young and in love, Hermione willingly yields her total financial authority to Richard by giving him “a power of attorney to deal with all as he would,” avowing that “what she was in name he

should be in fact” (1: 6). In fact, Hermione places all “unreservedly in his hands, and kept nothing for herself” (1: 6). Yet, she is still the mistress of the house. Richard knows the risk involved in marrying her. On the eve of his marriage, he knows that he is sacrificing “his profession and independence” and “throwing himself as a dependent on her bounty, if she liked to make it so” (1: 4). In fact, when Hermione evicts him from her house later for his averred atheism, Richard does not seem to possess anything else. He returns to his “maiden” name Spence and works for his daily bread as an institutional lecturer.

The somewhat drastic trajectory from a loving, all-giving submissive wife to an evictor of her husband begins with the arrival of a new High Church vicar, whose name is tellingly Launcelot Lascelles. As a blatant anti-Tractarian novel, *Under Which Lord?* is predictably full of caricatures of Catholics and supporters of the High Church. Lascelles is the epitome of the evil Jesuit-in-disguise, whose sole aim is supposedly to allure rich heiresses and drain their wealth. He embodies all of what Protestants perceive as Catholic evils: blind obedience, surveillance, manipulation, confession, Mariolatry, and saint worship. In fact, he is described as “a Roman Catholic in all save name and obedience, being his own pope and college of cardinals in one” (1: 27). Desiring to obtain Hermione’s trust so that he can eventually take control of her money, he completely ignores Richard—who is, as Lascelles perfectly knows, impecunious and completely dependent on Hermione’s magnanimity—and gives his full attention only to Hermione, calling her repeatedly “the Lady of the Manor” and “the lay-rector” (1: 50).¹³⁴ In his first visit to Crossholme Abbey, Lascelles has a chance to have a private interview with Hermione for an hour before Richard comes in to the room. Lascelles makes the most of the time: he quickly finds out Hermione’s secret yearning and feeling of emptiness and

¹³⁴ Lascelles calls Hermione “the lay-rector” throughout the novel.

gives a High Church explanation and solution to her feelings by “put[ting] the words into her mouth, and . . . [making] her assent to them” (1: 35). During this private interview, he boldly states that “duty to God through His Church [is] the most” important duty for anyone, assuring her that it is not likely that Richard will be against allowing her “free exercise of [her] own conscience—and [her] own means,” implying overtly that in that case she should defy Richard (1: 36, 38).

As ludicrously stereotypical as Lascelles is, it is undeniable that his arrival leads to the Fullertons starting their respective spiritual journeys. As for Hermione, from the conventional girlish wife who resigns everything to her husband as she has been taught, she is called out to become an autonomous agent not only for herself but also for her property. It is also worthwhile to remember that Hermione’s longing for something that can revive her has been present even before Lascelles’s arrival on the scene:

[S]he used to ask herself—with health, fortune, a faultless husband, a sweet and interesting child, and the faculty of loving and rejoicing as fresh as when she was herself a child—how could she have a void? What was it? Why did she feel so lonely, so bereft as she did?—for in what blessing did she fail?

She could not tell. Nevertheless, there it was; a fact as true as the rest. She used to sigh when she read those tender bits of poetry, sang those yearning songs which once expressed her own condition, but which now seemed pictures of a land that she had lost, of a home whence she was shut out. Tears were often in her eyes as she looked at the golden sunset, or watched the changing clouds, or wondered at the mystery of the stars. She did not know what ailed her; but there

was so often that aching at her heart, as if her life were empty of some sweetness that it ought to have! (1: 11-12)

Hermione yearns for something that she thinks she once possessed but lost; without it, she feels her life is empty and meaningless. Noticeably, these types of yearnings are often portrayed in the religious novel to prepare the reader for the upcoming spiritual journey of the protagonist. That Hermione could not find the meaning of her current life and “wonder[s] at the mystery of the stars” implies that her yearning is of a spiritual nature. Hermione herself ponders over the possibility of a spiritual explanation: “Sometimes she thought this secret pining of hers came from an unregenerate heart and the want of vital religion (1: 13). But the old vicar of Crossholme is “sleepy, indolent, [and] ‘unawakened’ . . . [and] could not lead her to [divine] knowledge (1: 14). And her husband is unable to help her in any spiritual development. Richard moves in the opposite direction as Hermione pines for some guidance. He becomes “a pronounced free-thinker—agnostic he called himself; infidel he was called by others,” and science takes “the seat of theology” for him (1: 14). Additionally, while Hermione virtually remains a girlish wife, Richard undergoes “the natural development of youth into manhood” (1: 9). Unlike Hermione, whose love feeds on perpetual excitement, Richard’s contented love allows him to pay attention to other business. He takes care of his wife’s property and pursues his duties and studies, never realizing that Hermione resents his tranquil trust and calm, if steadfast, love.

Meanwhile, their nineteen-year-old daughter, Virginia, who is described as “the most like a human lily to be seen anywhere” and “the most of a saint out of

canonization,” leads an uninspired life with her atheist father and despondent mother (1: 18):

Her father—happy, busy, contented with his lot all round, giving his main strength to educating certain men, young and old, into such knowledge of science as should lead them to the rejection of both Christian dogma and clerical influence . . . was a grand and glorious figure in this life, truly; but he was not her companion; and at her age, with her nature, she wanted religion, not philosophy; faith, not scepticism; adoration of God and the angels, not critical examination of verbal forms and isolated facts in natural history.

Her mother, outwardly happy because calm and uncomplaining . . . inwardly withdrawing herself more and more from her husband . . . neither religious nor irreligious . . . always conscious of that dull aching void and suffering from her nameless yearning, but unable to kill the one or satisfy the other—was even less a guide, less a companion than her father might have been.

(1: 17)

Virginia, “a natural nun” and “fair young saint,” begins to ask herself about the meaning of her life and her place in this world (1: 18, 19). She does not care for men’s love at all, and “the idea of marriage . . . associated with her” “seemed sacrilege rather than the fulfilment of a natural destiny” (1: 19). In fact, because the only thing she longs for is “that unknown, undesignated life of spiritual exaltation, of the realization of God,” the novel describes her as an inevitable nun: “[H]ad she been a Roman Catholic her vocation would have been assured” (1: 20, 18). The expatriated nunlike Virginia is described as a curious combination of the opposite sides of her parents: “Her mother’s need of romantic

emotion and personal excitement was mated with her father's passionate love of truth for its own sake; and both together gave her the possibility of that exalted and unselfish devotedness which once made martyrs and still makes zealots" (1: 21). And as days go on, Virginia miserably pines for some spiritual home to which she can belong:

The religious life must have something in it, if only she knew what it was! Girl as she was, day by day she became more sorrowfully if still only dimly conscious that this was not her fitting sphere; and that lying for her elsewhere were work and peace of a far different kind from these lady-like occupations of no earthly good when done . . . such as made up the life of home. But what? and where? (1: 22)

Again, with the longing for her "fitting sphere," Virginia is more than ready to set out on her spiritual journey toward her true home. She needs a mere gentle push to set her off on her spiritual journey.

With the advent of Lascelles, then, both Hermione and Virginia come to gain the momentum that initiates their predicted journeys. They are not the only persons whose spiritual journeys Lascelles ludicrously instigates; many other characters of the novel begin their journeys with the help of Lascelles, who is, in the language of religious conversion, an advocate.¹³⁵ As an anti-Tractarian novel, *Under Which Lord?* overtly mocks, disparages, and denigrates the High Church and everything imaginably pertaining to it, such as Anglican sisterhood and the legendary tyranny of female abbesses; auricular confession and sensual, if not sexual, crimes at the confessional; celibacy and/or failure to remain celibate; avarice; manipulation; surveillance; and mendacity of the priesthood. However, even before the introduction of the anti-Tractarian theme of the novel that is

¹³⁵ See Rambo.

personified in Lascelles, *Under Which Lord?* presents at least two of its characters at the third stage in their conversion process; Hermione and Virginia undergo context, crisis, and quest stages, and they enter the encounter stage with the arrival of Lascelles.¹³⁶ What is perhaps most intriguing about this novel is that, despite its almost cloying repetitions of the hackneyed anti-Tractarian narratives in its long middle section, both Hermione and Virginia reach what seem to be their proper destinies at the end. Although Hermione's conversion is strongly affected by the handsome and flirting Lascelles, it is worth noting that her decision is depicted as a genuine spiritual choice, as seen in her attempt to convert Richard at his deathbed at the end of the novel. The last pages tell the reader that Virginia, "a natural nun," is now "a professed nun" in Rome as she, with predilection, desired (3: 307):

[Virginia] went through her prayers and psalms with an ecstatic passion of devotion that seemed to wrap her very soul away. Home and parents were alike forgotten; her father's death, her mother's tears—nothing touched her, absorbed as she was in the adoration of a mystery—the worship of the Divine Sacrifice.

She was as dead to Hermione as was Richard himself. (3: 307)

Virginia now finds what satisfies her soul's secret yearning; family ties and all other earthly relations are dead to her. Even the sight of the widowed Hermione, sobbing and stretching out her hands to her daughter on the other side of the convent grate, fails to move Virginia. Although the daughter becomes "suddenly paler even than before" in the presence of her weeping mother, Virginia makes "[n]o sign of recognition" of Hermione. (3: 307).

¹³⁶ Here I follow Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian's model of the conversion process. They name seven stages of the conversion process: context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences. See Rambo and Farhadian 23-24.

Anti-Tractarian readers might have inferred the possible tyranny of the abbess or surveillance of Virginia's companion nun Sister Agnes, who is, in fact, the one who originally initiated Virginia into Roman Catholicism and later into convent life.¹³⁷ The reading that argues that Virginia's spiritual journey is a successful one might sound too modern, a retrospective reading made possible from the perspective of an age of religious tolerance. However, it is beyond doubt that Virginia's predilection finds a strong affinity for the convent and that her fascination with the Roman Catholic Church is a "true spiritual exaltation, wherein human love, strong as it was for Sister Agnes, counted only as the medium not the end" (1: 205).¹³⁸

Other than functioning as a successful advocate of the High Church, Lascelles plays a momentous role in questioning the power relation of the family. With his quick, mercenary eyes from the first meeting on, he quickly grasps the unusual financial arrangements between husband and wife and recognizes Hermione as the sole legal owner of Crossholme. Lascelles misleadingly assures the puzzled Hermione—whose traditional deference to her husband is for the first time, however slightly, mocked as a lapse of her religious duty—that "[w]e do not come between husband and wife" (1: 37). Of course, predictably for the anti-Tractarian novel, that is precisely what he does: "Part of the power of the sect to which Mr. Lascelles belonged lies in its secret dealing with women and the young, and the consequent gradual weakening of home authority which is

¹³⁷ There were strong suspicions that abbesses tyrannized over their nuns and novices. And to prevent novices from telling the truth to their family, a supervisor nun supposedly accompanied them.

¹³⁸ The following quotation shows that Sister Agnes functions as a surrogate mother to Virginia: "To Virginia she was, even when the giver of penance, secretly the tender mother, the holy guide; and made the girl feel that she was her favourite lamb in all the flock; the nearest and the dearest, and dear to Saint Agnes and the Blessed Mother also. Day by day Virginia's submission increased and her love grew—a love which associated Sister Agnes with the angels, and made her feel that in obeying her she was obeying Christ—in loving her she was loving God" (1: 139-40).

to be replaced by clerical domination,” and Crossholm soon undergoes domestic upheaval and chaos as a consequence of the power shift (2: 19-20).

The first meeting between Lascelles and Hermione can, in fact, be read as a mock confession scene.¹³⁹ This time the husband, who finds the clergyman and his wife tête-à-tête for an hour, does not jump at the adulterous conclusion. Combined with his failure to prevent the prolongation of the private scene, this lack of analytic insight gives the clergyman full throttle to control the plot. Lascelles and Hermione are left alone to the great benefit of Lascelles’s schemes, and Lascelles makes the most of this opportunity to study Hermione’s character, flattering Hermione by praising her. When Richard finally comes, Lascelles quickly turns the topic of conversation to the outside view of the house, and Richard does not realize that Hermione talks “with an unusual nervousness in her manner” (1: 39). It is widely noted how Victorian novels utilize or resist the popular trope that makes men of science, mostly doctors, powerful interpretive agents. Ironically, Richard, a staunch advocate of science, simply fails to transfer his skills as a scientific observer to this domestic situation. His mind still full of study, Richard fails to read the scene as one of spiritual seduction, Lascelles’s first surreptitious encroachment on his hitherto peaceful hearth. Lascelles can sneakily extend his schemes because he understands the meaning of the scene and rightly interprets verbal and nonverbal languages. He knows that he has already finished an initial analysis of the wife’s character and laid a well-located foundation for his future schemes.

¹³⁹ I call this scene “a mock confession scene” because of the nature of the meeting between the ritualist vicar and the wife. In one hour alone with Hermione, Lascelles “had got her to confess” a lot of things and extract from her even more information. He also “had put the words into her mouth, and he made her assent to them” (1: 35). Lascelles and Hermione’s power relation in this scene is a close replica of the relationship between the confessor and the confessant.

Instead of Richard, Lascelles assumes the role of confessor and skillfully elicits from Hermione a confession of her inner life. Lascelles asserts that “he could read her [Hermione] like . . . ‘an open book of goodly print and fair illuminations,’” and Hermione admits that “his penetration was marvellous” (1: 35-36). Chapter 3 describes how a confessor’s reading of the confessant’s interiority accrues power to the confessor. Here Lascelles obtains knowledge about and power over Hermione by saying that he sees through her and knows her. It is no wonder that Richard, who does not know anything about Virginia’s and Hermione’s inner states, loses his authority; at the beginning he does not realize that his study gives Lascelles one invaluable hour to set the snare for Hermione; he does not have any idea about his wife’s and Virginia’s yearnings. Flattered, confused, and ignorant, Hermione appears to sense that something is not quite right, yet she does not see through the hidden meaning behind the scene. She accepts only the surface interpretation: she sees only that she has been visited by a new, amiable vicar who offers guidance about her spiritual duties. Lascelles dominates the scene and directs the following plot with his knowledge.

Interestingly, a parodic version of this scene is repeated later in the final pages, this time with different characters: Hermione, Richard, and a female Lascelles, namely, Mrs. Edith Everett (later Mrs. Lascelles), who hides and eavesdrops behind the door. In the earlier scene, it is the clergyman who intrudes into the marital relationship and finds it necessary to disguise his intention with a neutral comment on the view. Now, the wife is depicted as if she is caught in the act of indulging in an extramarital affair, and the husband is described as if he is tempting an innocent woman into a wrong relationship. By now, Hermione’s spiritual transformation is almost completed: she is thoroughly

persuaded that to live with Richard, the proclaimed atheist, is to live with Satan and to let Richard control her property any longer is to offer a valuable weapon to the enemy of the church. Defeated, penniless, and now childless, Richard is about to leave Crossholm.

When Hermione seems to repent and tries to prevent him from leaving, Edith jumps in:

“You must not go!” she [Hermione] exclaimed. “Richard! my husband! my beloved!”

The door opened abruptly, and Edith Everett came quickly into the room.

“I am afraid I am intruding,” she said, with a cold, sarcastic smile. “But the bell is ringing, Hermione, and we shall be late for evensong.”

Hermione shrank back as if she had been detected in a crime. (3: 169)

The message of this anti-Tractarian novel is clear enough: marriage, one of the most sacred institutions of the Victorian period, is metamorphosed into something monstrous, chaotic, and anarchical under the guidance of a ritualist.

Interestingly, while Lascelles and Hermione believe that religion lends authority to justify the termination of marriage, Richard simply appeals to the logic of love in his last plea to Hermione. In *High Church*, wife and husband both rely on the biblical sources for their authority; in *Under Which Lord?*, the husband does not rely on anything other than secular understanding of love and legal authority. According to Lascelles, Hermione makes her marriage “not love . . . [but] idolatry,” because “[her] infidel husband, whom [she] should spurn from [her] as a viper—as a child of hell—stands nearer to [her] than [her] God, than [her] Saviour” (1: 262). Ridiculously simple and nonsensical as this may sound, what is significant is that Lascelles stresses religious duty as the reason for his command. Lascelles keeps iterating that “she [Hermione] owed a

higher duty to God than even to her husband,” and Hermione accepts this teaching, truly believing that she is obeying God (1: 98). By contrast, asked by Hermione why he is leaving, Richard calmly tells her, “You have preferred Mr. Lascelles to me, and I have no choice left me” (3: 166). Although Hermione stutteringly responds, “Not Mr. Lascelles to you, but my Director,” Richard states, “Man or Director, it is all one to me. . . . I make no difference between the two” (3: 166). Previously unaware of the sinister implication of the first meeting scene, Richard is now fully cognizant of his situation and the identity of his enemy. He does not distinguish between Lascelles the Director and Lascelles the handsome and attractive man. Wrapped in a religious garment or not, Lascelles is a man; for Richard, he is an evil and destructive man who has seduced a once impeccable and willingly deferential wife to idolatry and has irreversibly broken up his family.

Under Which Lord? appears to argue that a husband’s authority comes not from his legal rights or the logic of “one flesh” but from his wife’s voluntary love and submission; the titular question of the novel asks Hermione to choose between love and religion, and Hermione’s decision comes from her decision to place spiritual autonomy over earthly love: “Love or religion—her husband’s control or her Director’s authority—the obligations of marriage or the ordinances of the Church—which would win? Under which Lord would she finally elect to serve?” (3: 139). Opposing love and religion, the novel seems to ask why love should mean “husband’s control” and why a woman’s choice should be limited to serving one lord or another.

Under Which Lord? asks a serious question regarding the power structure of a family. If the novel were only about religious matters, as a self-confessed agnostic, Linton might have just attacked the High Church without giving too much agency to

Hermione. On the other hand, if the novel were a simple postmarriage-plot novel, Linton, given her notorious antifeminism and vitriolic criticism of the New Woman, might have depicted Hermione as an uppity woman defying the tradition of her society. Since *Under Which Lord?* merges the religious and the postmarriage plots, it gives room for questioning familial power structure itself; Hermione is given more power and legal rights than many Victorian women enjoyed to highlight the High Church's abuse, and she is depicted as an autonomous agent who reaches maturity in her religious trajectory. A self-proclaimed agnostic, Linton successfully depicts Richard as a victim of religiosity and bigotry, but the price she pays for the plausible depiction of agnostic Richard is that Linton seems, however unwittingly, to promote women's rights. Read along with numerous other religious novels of different religious positions, *Under Which Lord?*, a novel with the postmarriage religious plot, poses for its readers a resounding question, "under which lord?," from where should familial authority arise?

The Heir of Redclyffe: Egalitarian Education Plot

In addition to questioning the power structure of the family, Victorian religious novels' postmarriage plot presents another interesting insight into Victorian marital relationships by presenting the husband as an imperfect individual, the main character in the education plot, along with his wife. Unlike protagonists in the marriage plot, who receive sufficient education before they are married, recently married wives and husbands in the postmarriage plot are depicted as not fully mature: they grow mentally throughout their early married lives to become adult men and women. Like many of Emma

Worboise's postmarriage-plot novels,¹⁴⁰ *The Wife's Trials: a Tale* tells the story of a girlish wife, the eponymous Lilian Grey, and an immature husband, Basil Hope.¹⁴¹ At the time of her marriage, Lilian is ignorant about distinctions among church parties. She has been to church but is not yet spiritually awakened. Raised in a strictly Evangelical family, Basil, too, does not care for religion. Their marital life soon becomes disastrous as the initial passion wears off; Basil returns to gambling and drink, and Lilian gets addicted to parties. Only after losing her baby does Lilian turn to a Bible given to her as a wedding present by her invalid friend at the beginning of the novel. When Lilian asks her friend how she has learned "the secret of perpetual peace and content," the friend gives her the Bible and says, "I learnt it *here*" (9; italics in the original). While reading the Bible, her long-neglected present, Lilian miraculously converts to Evangelical Christianity. She endures Basil's estrangement as God's punishment, maturing spiritually. Later, in his convalescence from a nearly fatal disease, Basil also converts and learns to be a mature and responsible Christian. As seen in this representatively educational novel, many postmarriage-religious novels include a postmarital-education plot for both members of a couple. I argue that, in contrast to the marriage-plot novel, the religious novel genre's postmarriage-education plot is quite egalitarian as it includes the husband as the recipient of a valuable education. This section concentrates on *The Heir of Redclyffe* to study the characteristics of the religious novel's education plot. Although most characters of *The Heir of Redclyffe* obtain their education before marriage, they continue their education after marriage, and their married lives are presented as opportunities to practice what they

¹⁴⁰ For example, see her *Married Life: or, The Story of Philip and Edith* (1863) and *Husbands and Wives* (1873).

¹⁴¹ Eponymous because many editions' full title of the novel is *The Wife's Trials; or, Lilian Grey*. See Wolff 510.

have learned and to show whether their education can help them endure the trials of married life.

This section is thus a response to current scholarship that, by connecting the history of Victorian religion with gender studies, tends to concentrate on a denomination's doctrine concerning what women could/should do or not do. My contribution will come from a different perspective, one seen through the genre of the Victorian religious novel; religious bildungsromans preach an egalitarian message by rendering men equal to women in terms of their educational plots. This view is different from what other scholars have argued so far, for example in the several insightful essays in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, namely, that a certain religious movement, a religious group's view of women's spiritual superiority, or women's identification with a feminized image of Jesus, helped to bring about the reconsideration of women's place in society.¹⁴² In fact, I am afraid that this approach in current scholarship is not complete enough to apply to the Victorian religious novel since the propagandistic nature of the prolific religious-novel genre guarantees that any women's rights movement will find effectual mouthpieces.

From its first publication in 1853, *The Heir of Redclyffe* enjoyed wide circulation. For about fifty years, until Charlotte Yonge's death in 1901, it was reprinted almost annually and remained one of the most beloved novels of Victorian England. This section seeks to analyze its marriage and postmarriage plots in detail, comparing them with the conventional marriage plot. In the conventional marriage plot, it is mostly the female protagonist who undergoes a serious education. Her character is developed in the course of novel, and she learns her lessons through some humiliating experiences undergone not

¹⁴² See essays in "Editors' Topic: 'Victorian Religion,'" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31.1 (Mar. 2003).

by her fault, which would have rendered her not a desirable wife, but mostly by that of her family members. At the end, she emerges as a morally balanced, highly recommendable woman who is worthy of receiving her award, her well-matched suitor. In *The Heir of Redclyffe*, this pattern is intriguingly inverted. It is Sir Guy Morville and Philip Morville, rather than the pair of sister heroines, Amabel Edmonstone and Laura Edmonstone, who receive the benefit of the education plot both before and after their marriages. In their married lives, Guy and Philip are given a chance to practice or ruminate about what they have learned. It is true that the female protagonists, especially Laura, are also educated but the focus is unmistakably on the male protagonists because, as Elisabeth Jay notes, “The plot is concerned with the induction of a noble savage from the English squirearchy into Tractarian culture” (49).

Significant and interesting in the novel’s education plot are who is most educated, what they learn, where they receive their education, and who teaches them. The main recipients of the teaching are Guy and Philip, and the main theme in their education is unvaryingly morality and spiritual discipline, which are traditionally thought to be specialties for women. More significantly, Christian morality is taught as being superior to intellect. Not surprisingly, the arena where the fight between intellect and morality is held is the home and most education takes place in domestic settings. The primary teacher is Mrs. Edmonstone, the mother figure of the novel, and her dressing room is the center of this fictional world along with the drawing room, which is described as the quintessential center of the home: “The drawing-room of Hollywell House was one of the favoured apartments, where a peculiar air of home seems to reside, whether seen in the middle of summer, . . . or, as when our story commences, [when] its bright fire and stands

of fragrant green-house plants contrasted with the wintry fog and leafless trees of November” (3). It is a shelter from outside adversity and a symbol of domestic peace, where all members of the family can come to relax and obtain valuable advice.

Guy’s education is described in terms of his peculiar situation. After the death of his grandfather, the only family he has, young Guy comes to live with the Edmonstones. A couple of months before his grandfather’s death, Guy is told for the first time about his parents’ tragic history and the murder his hot-tempered ancestor committed. He also hears how his father killed a man in a duel and how the confrontation between his grandfather and his father ended with the tragic death of his father. Obsessed with the idea that his family is cursed and he is predestined to develop a violent temper like his ancestors, Guy nevertheless fights against his faults and endeavors to control his quick temper. His cousin Philip is skeptical of the outcome from the beginning. His condescending attitude toward Guy and later his false report about Guy’s character severely provoke Guy into losing his temper, but in the end Guy emerges as a true Christian hero, gloriously sacrificing his life by nursing his longtime enemy, the determinedly prejudiced Philip. Only at Guy’s deathbed does Philip acknowledge Guy as the epitome of virtue and repentantly admits that his worldly intellect has prevented him from rightfully appreciating Guy’s superior morality.

The tension between Guy and Philip is both relieved and highlighted by the love plot. Laura idolizes Philip, and Amabel (Amy as she is fondly called by her family) falls in love with Guy. The sisters’, Guy’s, and Philip’s moral and spiritual journeys function to emphasize the importance of an individual’s choice and constant endeavor to attain discipline in his or her life. Laura and Amy are sisters, Guy and Philip are from the same

Morville family, and they are educated mostly at the same place. The implication is that character development depends more on one's decision to choose the right principle and morals than on a hereditary "curse" or environmental effects. As Mrs. Edmonstone sadly notes to Charles when Laura deeply disappoints her, "[t]he two girls [Laura and Amabel] had the same training" (448). The novel also warns against worldly wisdom and vain pride. From the beginning, "two sisters are [depicted as] specimens of fast and slow growth" and Philip's intellectual and reasoning power is contrasted with Guy's neglected education and only mediocre intellect (170). Laura's and Philip's early development inevitably leads them to become proud of their judgment, and remiss in identifying the possible danger of relying too much on themselves, not to mention resisting that danger; they are trapped in their self-justification until they finally realize their shortcomings at the expense of Guy's life and their happiness.

In her analysis of Frances Trollope's *The Abbess* and *Father Eustace*, Griffin argues that Frances Trollope relies on "the conventions of gothic and anti-Catholic literature . . . [to] plot stories of mothers, daughters, and female autonomy" ("Revising the Popish Plot" 279). Griffin points out that recasting the gothic tradition of "female victimhood, with [its] missing mothers, entombed nuns, and young women imprisoned in convents," allows Frances Trollope to highlight "central relationships between mothers and daughters based on what she sees as Protestant ideals" ("Revising the Popish Plot" 280). Griffin's argument also applies to *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Guy embodies the type of motherless, imprisoned gothic heroine. An orphan whose mother died the day after his birth, Guy is raised by his grandfather in Redclyffe. Set on top of a "magnificent cliffs

overhanging the sea, and fine woods crowning them,” Redclyffe’s description presents it as a typical gothic castle (11):

It was more like a scene in a romance than anything real—the fine old red sandstone house crumbling away in the exposed parts; the arched gateway covered with ivy; the great quadrangle where the sun never shone, and full of echoes; the large hall and black wainscoted rooms, which the candles never would light up. It is a fit place to be haunted. (10)

One of Redclyffe’s rooms, called Sir Hugh’s Chamber, is widely known to be haunted by a ghost of either old Sir Hugh, who, after leading a cruel and criminal life, loses his sanity and ends his own life by hanging himself, or the murderer Sir Hugh, who is reported to “groan and turn the lock of Dark Hugh’s chamber” (70).

Guy’s life in Redclyffe is uncannily similar to that of a gothic heroine, who is imprisoned there and watched closely. Guy’s grandfather “never let him be with other boys, and kept him . . . fettered by rules . . . [and] strictly watched” (11). Although Guy becomes physically free when he leaves Redclyffe, he is mentally locked up in the past history of his ancestors: “[I]t is my firm belief that such a curse of sin and death . . . rests on the descendants of that miserable man [Sir Hugh]. . . . Look at the history of the Morvilles, and see if it be an imagination. . . . Crime and bloodshed have been the portion of each—each has added weight and darkness to the doom which he has handed on” (71). Guy’s symbolic imprisonment in the dark past of his ancestors appears to be his unalterable doom. Guy’s strange resemblance to Sir Hugh seems to claim Guy as a future Sir Hugh, and Guy appears to be distinctly marked with true Morville brands. What eventually saves Guy is that “if [he is] a Morville [he is] also a Christian,” as Laura puts

it, and his sincere desire and hard labor to discipline himself eventually sculpt him to become an epitome of ideal Christian virtue (71).

Guy's own ceaseless efforts aside, Mrs. Edmonstone, a surrogate mother figure, is the main outside influence who greatly helps him to achieve Yonge's Christian ideals. Jay points out that "[w]omen are an important educative influence in this novel, thus quietly challenging the unquestioning assumption of Philip Edmonstone, self-appointed mentor to all his cousins, that a public school education followed by Oxford forms the educational gold standard" (50). Mrs. Edmonstone's teaching is more than a substitute for a formal (masculine) education for Guy, "an educational *tabula rasa*," as Jay fittingly dubs him (51). Earlier in the novel, advising Mrs. Edmonstone to give up teaching anything to Guy, Philip mockingly calls her "a tamer of savage beasts" (83). For Philip, who is deeply convinced of his own low estimation of Guy, the only possible relationship any educator can have with Guy is hierarchical and one-sided. However, Mrs. Edmonstone's education is based on a nurturing relationship with Guy, "a noble savage," and through this close relationship, she helps him in his self-formation (Jay 49). Mrs. Edmonstone, indeed, develops a closer relationship with Guy than with one of her own daughters, Laura, and Guy later learns to call her "mamma" just like her other children (337). Indeed, Guy is the only one who is carefully educated by Mrs. Edmonstone.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Her time being too much occupied with tending her invalid son Charles, who has been afflicted with a joint disease since he was about nine years old, Mrs. Edmonstone has been unable to "attend to her daughters in their girlish days" (122). And although the narrator tells that the youngest daughter's education is undertaken by Mrs. Edmonstone after the elder sisters' governess has left, Charlotte is educated by her siblings rather than by her mother. Charles even claims that Laura's and Amabel's characters are formed with the direct guidance of him and Philip. Guy's guardian, Mr. Edmonstone, is supposed to be the head of the family, but his authority is only nominal, his judgments are often easily molded by Philip and highly unreliable, and his actions are very often too rash. He is generally under the careful guidance of Mrs. Edmonstone, who takes pains to make him appear as the final authority.

Mrs. Edmonstone's education of Guy starts very soon after Guy comes to live with the Edmonstones. One Sunday afternoon after Guy's arrival, Mrs. Edmonstone finds Guy alone in the drawing-room crying over his dead grandfather. Encouraged by her kind words, Guy asks her to become his spiritual and moral guide:

I want to ask something—a great favour—but you make me venture. You see how I am left alone—you know how little I can trust myself. Will you take me in hand—let me talk to you—and tell me if I am wrong, as freely as if I were Charles? . . . You will let me trust to you to tell me when I get too vehement? above all, when you see my temper failing? Thank you; you don't know what a relief it is! (27)

Guy's criteria for self-discipline are very high, and he sometimes loses heart for not reaching them quickly enough. In his new domestic setting, Guy is also constantly provoked by "[Philip's] veiled assumption of superiority," his contempt for anything related to Redclyffe and for Guy's unsystematic education, and his prejudice against Guy himself (48). When he feels as if his hard endeavors are meaningless and do not help him escape the curse of "Redclyffe temper," as Philip contemptuously calls it, Mrs. Edmonstone allows Guy to cherish true hope for the first time by saying that she is sure "that if [Guy] always treats [his] failings in this way [with true repentance and a resolution not to repeat the same mistake], [he] must subdue them at last. . . . [T]he failures become slighter and less frequent, and the end is victory" (47, 49). With her kind encouragement and reminder to Guy that he is "one of us now," Guy acquires the necessary momentum to continue this seemingly endless and slow spiritual progress and moral pilgrimage (27). He also begins to regard his shortcomings not as the result of the

familial curse but as something other people necessarily deal with in their lives: “It was Mrs Edmonstone who first spoke to him cheerfully of a successful conflict with evil, and made him perceive that his temptations were but such as are common to man” (80). His imprisoned interiority set free for the first time with Mrs. Edmonstone’s help. Rather than denying all enjoyments as temptations and evils, Guy begins to learn “when and how to trust himself to enjoy” (80).

Mrs. Edmonstone not only teaches Guy about morality; she also tenderly corrects his crude manners and unrefined behaviors, such as “playing with something [such as] [s]cissors, pencil, paper-knife, or anything that came in his way,” when listening to other people and “pawing like a horse in the hall when he is kept waiting” (82, 83). For Philip, these are nothing but “a token of a restless, ill-regulated mind,” but for Mrs. Edmonstone, these habits are merely “a sign that he had no one to tell him of the tricks which mothers generally nip in the bud” (82, 83). Raised alone, Guy does not have a clear sense of how his behavior appears to others, and Mrs. Edmonstone’s gentle broaching of the topic functions as a mirror in which he for the first time distinctly sees his own reflection. Listening to Philip one evening, Guy absentmindedly plays with Mr. Edmonstone’s spectacle case until its spring breaks. Later, alone with Guy, Mrs. Edmonstone gently admonishes him:

“The spectacle-case forestalled me in giving you a lecture on sparing our nerves. Don’t look so very full of compunction—it is only a trick which your mother would have stopped at five years old, and which you can soon stop for yourself.”

“Thank you, I will,” said Guy; “I hardly knew I did it, but I am very sorry it has teased you.” (84)

It is often pointed out that in nineteenth-century fiction, a representation of a mother and daughter reading an open book indicates a moment of self-formation. And Griffin notes that “the mother’s loving lessons [are] . . . the ‘natural’ and non-coercive means of subject formation” in Frances Trollope’s above-mentioned two novels. (“Revising the Popish Plot” 282). In this novel with inverted gender types, I argue, Mrs. Edmonstone’s tender lessons function in the same way for Guy. Guy’s journey toward self-formation thus truly begins with Mrs. Edmonstone. He reveals “self-command in no common degree” in keeping his promises, and his hitherto dormant self begins to develop in relation to others (84). What is noteworthy in his development is that he learns these things in a domestic setting, in the context of domestic issues such as whether to attend a party and how to treat others politely.

Guy’s education plot reaches at its climax when he is wrongfully accused of gambling by Philip; Guy is given a chance to practice what he has learned so far in this episode. This accusation costs Guy his love, Amabel, for Mr. Edmonstone, reacting too hastily, believes that Philip’s report is true. On receiving the letter of accusation and learning the identity of his accuser, Guy initially loses his temper completely. He swears that “a heavy account shall he [Philip] pay me for this crowning stroke of a long course of slander and ill will,” with his “teeth clenched, in an excess of deep vengeful ire” (224). Guy is on the verge of discarding all that he previously learned about self-control and Christian ideals as he concentrates on his revenge. Nowhere is the so-called “Redclyffe temper” as evident as it is here (47): “Never had Morville of the whole line felt more

deadly fierceness than held sway over him, as he contemplated his revenge” (224-25).

Guy is given a hard trial to prove that he has truly internalized his lessons.

But Guy, armed with Mrs. Edmonstone’s teaching, does not finally give way to anger or revenge. Just as he sits down to devise his plan of vengeance, he looks at the sun setting in front of him. That sight recalled him not only to himself, but to his true and better self,” and he realizes that he needs to go through one final battle with “the hereditary demon of the Morvilles watching by his side” (225). Knowing that he cannot honestly forgive Philip, he nevertheless forces himself to speak out the sixth part of the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,” again and again and waits until complete forgiveness can be candidly given (226). Guy struggles to focus on Philip’s intention, and he lets himself admit that Philip acts upon honorable intentions of saving Amabel and him from further evils. Recalling his own “murderous impulse,” Guy humbly admits his shortcomings and readily forgives Philip: “The victory was won!” declares the narrator (226, 227). Guy’s education is successfully tested. After this hard trial and victory, Guy is beyond the reach of Philip’s taunting remarks and condescending attitude. He is now a “man instead of boy,” with “a look of having suffered, and conquered suffering” (335). The hard trial, given not in the postmarriage plot but in the marriage plot, makes him grow “in character, his excitability and over-sensitiveness . . . have been smoothed away, and . . . given place to a calmness of tone, that was by no means impassibility” (345). His fiancée, Amabel, is no longer called “silly little Amy” after she successfully endures her separation from Guy (13). Her brother Charles calls her a “woman” from that time on (389). When Amabel and Guy

triumphantly prove that they are able to practice the Christian ideals of the novel, they are rewarded with adulthood and marriage.

Guy's education to become a Christ-like hero now reaches the last stage; he needs to learn how to die as a Christian. *The Heir of Redclyffe* relies on the deathbed conversion to prove the authenticity of Guy's education and to initiate Philip's transformation. The deathbed conversion moment in the VRN is a highly melodramatic device, and it is utilized as one of the most powerful tools to indicate the genuine character of the conversion, as pointed out in previous chapters. Philip contracts a fever when he foolhardily decides to travel through Italian towns known to be highly infectious, and he is left to die alone. Guy and Amabel, who are on their honeymoon, initially propose to accompany him until they hear of the possibility of infection. Still prejudiced against Guy, Philip suspects that Guy's prudent decision not to travel through these areas is "caused by Guy's dislike to submit to him, and a fit of impatience of which Amy was the victim" (407). Guy and Amabel hear of a single Englishman dying of fever, find out that it is their cousin, and go to nurse him in peril of their lives. As Philip finally begins to recover, Guy catches the fatal fever. At Guy's deathbed, Guy's longtime persecutor, Philip finally admits his prejudices and realizes the full extent of his actions:

Philip had retired to his own room the night before, overwhelmed by the first full view of the extent of the injuries he had inflicted, the first perception that pride and malevolence had been the true source of his prejudice and misconceptions, and for the first time conscious of the long-fostered conceit that had been his bane from boyhood. All had flashed on him with the discovery of the true purpose of the demand which he thought had justified his persecution. He saw the glory of

Guy's character and the part he had acted,—he scale of self-admiration fell from his eyes, and he knew both himself and his cousin. (469)

Depicted as a man of intellect who enjoys “the sense of universal dominion,” and of false self-control and self-justification, Philip's salvation comes with realizing his true self (258). As pride, false self-control, and too much attention to people's opinion have hitherto been his stumbling blocks, Philip is shown for the first time to completely lose his self-control on hearing of Guy's death later: “He tottered back to his couch, and sank down, in a burst of anguish that swept away all the self-control that had once been his pride” (470).

As clearly revealed in his relationship with Laura, Philip is a smug man of utilitarian philosophy, a man who is engaged in “consequentialist moral reasoning” (Budge 208). After declaring his love to Laura, Philip asks her to keep their engagement a secret, and his reasoning shows the consequences of his bad moral training. Laura is naturally not at ease when she and Philip are with other family members and is sometimes too confused to know what to say. To prevent her from exposing their situation involuntarily, Philip advises her to “[e]mploy and strengthen [her] mind” by studying algebra, kindly sending her his own copy next day (153). As Gavin Budge notes, this “very original first gift from a lover” (*Heir* 155) reveals that “Utilitarian rationalism,” represented by reason, self-command, and suppression of emotion, is at the bottom of Philip's character (208). When Laura timidly asks if she can tell her mother of the engagement two years later, Philip answers her as follows:

[R]emember that you are not bound; I have never asked you to bind yourself. . . .

I ask no more without your parents' consent; but it would be giving them and you

useless distress and perplexity to ask it now. They would object to my poverty, and we should gain nothing; for I would never be so selfish as to wish to expose you to such a life as that of the wife of a poor officer; and an open engagement could not add to our confidence in each other. (270)

Philip's reasoning is that of a casuist. Instead of relying on a right principle, he argues that his case is unique. First, he reasons that they do not have an obligation to tell parents because he has not asked her to bind herself. Then he relies on the moral consequentialism, arguing that telling parents would not change their situation. The way he regards himself is clearly revealed in his answer. He is an honorable man who would not bind his love to him without her parents' consent. He also believes himself chivalrous because he protects his love from unnecessary pain by keeping their engagement a secret. Rather than seeing himself as he is, a moral consequentialist and casuist, he presents himself as a victim, a victim of poverty who sacrifices his happiness for the sake of his future wife's welfare.

At Guy's deathbed, he confronts his own self as he is for the first time. His reeducation begins with Guy, or rather with Guy's absence, and he now renounces the old self his former training and his self-admiration have made him. Instead of imposing his opinion on others, he humbly waits for the Edmonstones' decision regarding his relationship with Laura. Previously as ambitious as to wonder "[w]hat would not [he] himself do if those lands [Redclyffe lands] were his,—just what was needed to give his talents free scope?," after Guy's death, Philip shudders at his avarice (261): "He must profit by the death he had caused; he had slain, and he must take possession of the lands which, with loathing and horror, he remembered that he had almost coveted" (478). His

selfishness is completely gone, too. The idea that the inheritance would make him rich enough to marry Laura now does not provide any consolation. He even begs Amabel to accept his renouncement of the inheritance for the sake of her baby girl.

Worst of all, he is doomed to live with a vivid image of his previous self. His faithful pupil Laura has internalized his teachings and becomes a constant reminder of his previous self. After Guy's death and his transformation, Philip asks Laura to forgive him for misleading her. To his horror, he hears Laura repeating his logic back to him:

"Forgive the advantage I took of your reliance on me to lead you into error, when you were too young to know what it amounted to."

"It was not an engagement," faltered Laura.

"Laura, don't, for mercy's sake, recall my own hateful sophistries," exclaimed Philip, as if unable to control the pain it gave him. . . . "[I]t was self-deceit; a deception first of myself, then of you." (543)

Having idolized Philip to the extent that she believes that everything he says is the ultimate truth, Laura is faithful to Philip's previous logic until her wedding service is over at the end of the novel. Philip realizes that his wrong training of Laura has turned her into a female "Philip," and he has to live with a constant remainder of his previous self:

As to Philip, though his love for her was unchanged, it now and then was felt, though not owned by him, that she was not fully a helpmate, only a "Self"; not such a "Self" as he had left at St Mildred's, but still reflecting on him his former character, instead of aiding him to a new one. (554)

Drawing our attention to the similarity between Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (*The Betrothed*), a book that the cousins read together earlier in the novel, and *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Rosemary Mitchell points out that the story of *The Betrothed* is the epitome of Guy's fate in *The Heir of Redclyffe*. The novel's reliance on intertextuality is, indeed, quite manifest from the numerous other texts, including *Sintram* and the Bible, read and quoted in it. Yonge adopts biblical characterization to make the novel's Christian morality easier to digest for her reader. As Budge notes, "the entire novel can be read in typological terms, as a kind of allegory of the doubting nineteenth-century soul's path to faith" (208). In this exemplary novel, Guy is "a Christ figure" and Laura is an Eve-like character with the "moral 'fall' [she] has undergone through taking Philip's word as law rather than trusting to her own God-given moral intuitions" (209). Of course, as Mitchell notes, "[t]he reader of *The Heir of Redclyffe* . . . is encouraged to follow Guy's example, not Philip's" (32). But, are we supposed to follow Guy only? Are the readers not supposed to follow the example of the heir of Redclyffe? As Robert Lee Wolff acutely notes, Guy inherited Redclyffe before the novel begins, and it is Philip who is the heir throughout the novel until he finally inherits it:

The Heir of Redclyffe is as much the story of Philip Morville's conquest over himself as it is of Guy's. But Philip—overbearing, conceited, self-satisfied, and Guy's personal enemy—is so disagreeable a character that the reader can easily emerge from the book without realizing that Charlotte Yonge intended Philip's development to be as important as Guy's and to teach another variety of the same lesson. (134)

Typologically, if Guy is a Christ, Philip is “a nineteenth-century Everyman” in this Victorian spiritual pilgrimage, with his character representing almost all possible evils of the material world and utilitarian philosophy (Budge 208). Andrew H. Miller notes that “the Victorians’ exhortative praise of ideal figures, so quickly cloying to subsequent sensibilities, was in the service of a relation to oneself that followed from one’s relation to others and led to one’s betterment” (4). Guy’s progress toward the Christian ideals and his final embodiment of these ideals are narrated for the benefit of Philip and, thus, of contemporary Victorians. More importantly, Guy’s and Philip’s education is depicted within their marriage/postmarriage relationship. The novelty of *The Heir of Redclyffe* is in its emphasis on the education of male characters through the marriage and the postmarriage plot.

The Perpetual Curate and Robert Elsmere: Wives’ Stories

While introducing and describing a rector in his house, the narrator of Charles Maurice Davies’s *Philip Paternoster* (1858) pauses to tell the readers that they should pay attention to the rector and not to his wife since she is simply not the main concern of the novel:

He [Philip Paternoster] was seated at the dining-room table, where were all the appliances for a “heavy tea,” including the rector’s wife, who was proportionately heavy, too. But as the lady does not figure much here (rector’s wives seldom do in any story), we must be ungallant enough to omit all description of her, having merely remarked that, in point of bulk, she was no unworthy counterpart of her better self. (1: 74)

A rector's wife as one of main characters is indeed a rarity in the VRN. Most religious novels prefer laymen and laywomen as their protagonists; clergymen are often minor characters of the VRN, and while married clergymen do appear, their wives, as in *Philip Paternoster*, are not usually main concerns of the novel. When, in some rare cases, religious novels cast clergymen as protagonists, these novels present mostly single clergymen in the marriage plot and show how these men obtain (or fail to win) their companions as a consequence of their respective spiritual trajectories. Additionally, in the case of Catholic or anti-Catholic novels, clerical marriage or marital life, quite naturally, is simply not a primary concern: if the novels feature Catholic clergymen or priests as main characters, they naturally are and remain celibate. If they were married before they converted to Catholicism, the wives are usually depicted as obstacles in their paths to true religion. The agony of these abandoned wives is not usually represented in detail, as in the example of Margaret Oliphant's *The Perpetual Curate* (1864).

The Perpetual Curate features a subplot about a married Anglican rector, Gerald Wentworth, who converts to Catholicism. When Gerald's family suspects that he is about to convert, Gerald's wife, Louisa, sends an urgent letter to his brother Frank Wentworth, the perpetual curate of the novel, asking him to come and talk to Gerald. To Frank, Louisa bewails her miserable situation. She wonders "what is to be my name, and whether I am to be considered a widow— . . . when your husband is a Romish priest . . . I would just ask anybody what are you? You can't be his wife, because he is not allowed to have any wife; and you can't go back to your maiden name, because of the children; and how can you have any place in society?" (1: 240). Louisa laments that she will not have "the satisfaction of being a widow even" but will be "an improper person" who does not

have name or place in society. She feels “as if [she] had done something wicked, and been put out of the pale” (1: 240-41, 241, 240). For Frank, who has not thought of Gerald’s possible conversion from anyone else’s perspective, “his sister-in-law’s representation of this danger, as seen entirely from her own point of view” is quite shocking (1: 241):

He could have gone into Gerald’s difficulties with so much sympathy and fellow-feeling that the shock would have been trifling in comparison; and between Rome and the highest level of Anglicanism there was no such difference as to frighten the accustomed mind of the Curate of St Roque’s. But, seen from Louisa’s side, matters appeared very different: here the foundations of the earth were shaking, and life itself going to pieces; even the absurdity of her distress made the whole business more real; and the poor little woman, whose trouble was that she herself would neither be a wife nor a widow, had enough of truth on her side to unfold a miserable picture to the eyes of the anxious spectator. (1: 241-42)

It later turns out that Gerald cannot become a Roman priest—he is “a simple Catholic layman” with his conversion—but most of Louisa’s lamentations remain relevant (3: 67). She is a passive victim who cannot decide the course of her own life. As a wife, she is not expected to have her own religious opinion, yet she is the one who must suffer the consequences most sharply. When confronted with her fears, Frank is silent because “he did not know what answer to make her” (1: 242). Frank’s silence is echoed in the lack of attention to the point of view of clergymen’s wives in many religious novels. Religious novels are inevitably concerned with the transformation of the protagonist and the changes he or she needs to make. Probably, the corollary consequences of a conversion

regarding dependents are too numerous and complex to be narrated within the scope of the postmarriage-plot religious novel. Naturally, nowhere is the unjustness of a wife's situation heightened as in the postmarriage religious-plot novels that include the wife's perspective—as in *The Perpetual Curate*.

Robert Elsmere is a wonderful exception; not only does the novel make Catherine Leyburn, Robert Elsmere's wife, visible, but it also presents Catherine as a guide in Robert's education plot. Like many other postmarriage religious novels, it is the husband, Robert, who receives an education, but this time the wife, Catherine, gives most of the spiritual lessons, especially at the beginning of their relationship. She functions as a spiritual stimulant of the earlier development of Robert's spiritual growth and as an agonized witness of Robert's doubts and consequential desertion of the Anglican Church, to which she firmly clings. Later, in her marital trial that Robert's loss of faith causes, she is also given a chance to learn more about faith and religion and to revise her limited religious ideals. She then learns to accept Robert's religious position, and she eventually becomes a faithful inheritor of Robert's cause after his death. Although the title of the book appears to suggest that the book is about Robert Elsmere, Catherine's position and her views are well represented throughout the novel, highlighting the passive role a wife is expected to play and the acute agony she suffers as a victim who is expected to share the fate of a given decision.

From the beginning, Robert invites Catherine to be his guide in his spiritual journey, as we see in his marriage proposal: "Catherine, . . . [c]ome and enrich my life, . . . I dare not think what my future might be with you to guide, to inspire, to bless—dare not, lest with a word you should plunge me into an outer darkness I cannot face" (145).

After their marriage, Catherine's religious imagination and moral principles enrich and strengthen Robert, as noted by Edward Langham, Robert's Oxford tutor. The couple visits Oxford on their honeymoon tour and Langham notices Robert's spiritual growth under Catherine's influence:

She has affected him . . . at a period of life when he is more struck by the difficulty of being morally strong than by the difficulty of being intellectually clear. The touch of religious genius in her braces him like the breath of an Alpine wind. One can see him expanding, glowing under it. (152)

Settled in Robert's rectory at Murewell after their honeymoon, Robert happily enjoys his life as an English country clergyman working for the villagers with Catherine's help and guidance. Indeed, his dependence on her has taught her to love him more and more:

“[H]ow his very dependence had endeared him to Catherine! That vibrating responsive quality in him, so easily mistaken for mere weakness, which made her so necessary to him—there is nothing perhaps which wins more deeply upon a woman” (155). Robert even describes Catherine as a Christ-like figure and himself as John the Baptist in his conversation with Langham: “His [Robert's] voice altered as he mentioned his wife—grew extraordinarily soft, even reverential. . . . ‘I . . . am not fit to tie her shoe-strings’”

(170). The reference is to Mark 1, to John the Baptist's preaching in the wilderness:

“There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose” (Mark 1.7).

With the return of the long absent squire, Roger Wendover, Robert and Catherine's religious trials begin. Under the influence of Wendover, a well-known atheist scholar, Robert loses his faith. He confesses that “*miracles do not happen!*” and, with that

declaration, that “[a]ll these years of happy spiritual certainty, of rejoicing oneness with Christ” are over, too (332; italics in the original). So is his happy marital life. He cannot simply resign his rectorship. With Catherine and their child financially depending on him, “[t]his was no simple matter of his own intellectual consistency or happiness” (333). At the same time, he cannot bear preaching every Sunday “things [he does] *not* believe,—using words as a convention which those who hear [him] receive as literal truth” (344; italics in the original). He hurts Catherine, first by hiding the causes of his agony and then by confessing them. Deeply embedded in Evangelical beliefs, Catherine does not have the ability to understand her husband’s loss of faith. Although Catherine only briefly leaves him and their mutual love sustains their marital life, their opposite religious position make it hard for them to continue a harmonious life: “The first chapter of their common life was closed” with their departure from Murewell (369).

The couple moves to London and Robert works for the poor and eventually founds an alternative religion, “The New Brotherhood of Christ,” and dies of overwork (550). By now, Catherine’s love shows her the way to deal with her husband’s apostasy, teaching her to revise her exclusive and strict Evangelical positions:

You were right—I *would* not understand. . . . My Lord is my Lord always; but He is yours too. . . . *That* is what has been hidden from me; that is what my trouble has taught me. . . . God has not one language, but many. I have dared to think He had but one, the one I knew. I have dared . . . to condemn your faith as no faith. . . . But I *will* learn my lesson; I will learn to hear the two voices, the voice that speaks to you and the voice that speaks to me. . . . It is all plain to me now. It has been appointed me. (510-11; italics in the original)

With this confession, “to the end Elsmere and his wife were lovers as of old” (511). At Robert’s deathbed, Catherine has a vision in which she sees “the form of the Son of man,” who calls her (575). She implores the image not to take her yet: “Master! . . . I cannot leave him! Call me not! My life is here. I have no heart—it beats in his,” and she is greatly comforted when she learns that Robert’s final vision is about their happy time (576). Indeed, after Robert’s death, Catherine faithfully continues Robert’s work: “In the week she gave all her time and money to the various works of charity which [Robert] had started” (576).

Discussing the conclusion of *Robert Elsmere*, Warren Sylvester Smith comments that the ending follows “the good tradition of nineteenth-century novels”: “Although the hero dies, in the good tradition of nineteenth-century novels, his wife, torn between her old orthodoxy and the love of her husband, carries on” (9). For Smith, Catherine’s acceptance of Robert’s new religion signifies the triumph of the conventional marital relationship, the good wife’s submission to husband’s decision. However, considering the long marital companionship of Catherine and Robert and the education plot of the novel that eventually teach Catherine to overcome the narrow limits of her Evangelical ideals, I would argue rather that it is a triumph not simply of “the good tradition of nineteenth-century novel,” but of the religious postmarriage plot of *Robert Elsmere*.

Middlemarch: The Influence of the Religious Novel Tradition

While George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* is set in the years before the Reform Bill of 1832, since its publication many critics have read the novel as one about later Victorian society. For example, Leslie Stephen notes that *Middlemarch* is “a satire upon the

modern world” (662), and Florence Nightingale, after mentioning an active female philanthropist of the 1870s, asks, “Could not the heroine, the ‘sweet sad enthusiast,’ have been set to some such work as this?” (567).¹⁴⁴ The practice of reading *Middlemarch* as if it is set in the 1870s makes better sense in the light of *Middlemarch*’s religious background. In her prelude, Eliot draws a famous analogy between the life of Saint Theresa and the lives of “these later-born Theresas” (3). With a “passionate, ideal nature” that “demanded an epic life,” the original Theresa “found her epos in the reform of a religious order” (3). But “later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul,” and “[t]heir ardour alternated between a vague ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse” (3). Eliot’s claim that there was not “coherent social faith and order” to satisfy modern day Theresas appears to justify our reading of *Middlemarch* in terms of its religious background as a later Victorian novel, rather than as a novel set in the early 1830s (3). In the late 1820s and in the early 1830s, many scientific discoveries that later irrevocably shattered many Victorians’ faith were yet to be made; the Evangelical movement was still dominant. The most important religious movement of the 1830s, the Oxford Movement, was noticeably “the only reform movement the author overlooks in a

¹⁴⁴ Nightingale deplores the fact that Eliot “now can find no better outlet for the heroine. . . . *because she cannot be a ‘St. Theresa’ or an ‘Antigone,’ than to marry an elderly sort of literary impostor, and, quick after him, his relation, a baby sort of itinerant Cluricaune*” (567; italics in the original). Dorice Williams Elliott shares Nightingale’s view: “[T]he projects Dorothea attempts, but fails, to initiate in *Middlemarch* are associated with historical philanthropic heroines of the 1850s and 1860s, not the 1820s and 1830s when the novel is set”; “a general concern over improving nationwide housing conditions for the poor” was manifest in the 1850s and 1860s (193). Elliott consistently reads *Middlemarch* as a novel set in the 1860s. For example, Will Ladislav’s “choice of profession, as writer, politician, and reformer, would involve him in a movement that would lead not only to the 1832 Reform Bill but also to the 1867 Reform Bill that enfranchised working-class men as well. And, since there was an important attempt to include women’s suffrage in the 1867 Reform Bill, some reader might also associate Will’s career as a professional reformer with the cause of women” (211).

novel set in the early 1830s,” and “the Anglican Oxford Movement, with its patristic theology and medieval aesthetic,” was obviously one possible channel through which Dorothea Brooke could have realized her religious ideals (Adams 190). By contrast, by the 1870s, religion was not one of the main concerns of most Victorians. In the 1830s people could still look to the church or church leaders for their spiritual guidance; in the 1870s many Victorians felt lost and decentered in their religious lives. *Middlemarch* appears to support this reading when it says, “[T]he time was gone by for . . . spiritual directors” (80).

This section suggests that reading *Middlemarch* against the religious context of the 1870s—when spiritual paradigm began to lose its hold and religious indifference began to prevail, the time when Eliot’s claims that there are “no coherent social faith and order” and that “the time was gone by for . . . spiritual directors” make more sense (3, 80). Along with J. Hillis Miller, Kimberly VanEsvelde Adams supports this reading: “[T]he society of *Middlemarch* . . . seems to have experienced the disappearance of God” (165).¹⁴⁵ So the later-born Theresa in *Middlemarch* needs to find some institution other than religion within which she can realize her ardent desire to dedicate herself. But where can she find a suitable substitute?

Eliot ingeniously provides a surprising answer to this question: Eliot opens *Middlemarch* by showing the binary forces in one’s spiritual growth, the domestic and the epic, and combines these two seemingly opposing forces in Dorothea’s life. In little Saint Theresa’s episode that appears in the prelude, domestic concerns are presented to suppress religious ambitions: “[T]he little girl [Saint Theresa] walk[s] forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of

¹⁴⁵ Also, see J. Hillis Miller, *Disappearance of God* xi.

the Moors” (3). The children’s grand religious dream is soon interrupted when “domestic reality met them in the shape of uncles, and turned them back from their great resolve” (3). *Middlemarch* develops its plot with the “tension . . . [that] exist[s] between family life (‘domestic reality’) and higher yearning (the ‘epic life’)” of “later-born Theresas” (Torgovnick 25). Dorothea’s “theoretic” mind that “yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world” and that is “likely to seek martyrdom” does not easily find resources for her desire and answers to her questions in the later Victorian religious life around her (8). Like the original Theresa, she needs to lead an epic life and leaves the domestic reality that hinders her from realizing her higher yearning, but here lies Dorothea’s dilemma.¹⁴⁶ She does not seem to find any religious cause to passionately dedicate her life to. Other than wanting to lead a meaningful life, she does not seem even to know what exactly she wants to become. Nor are there many choices for her in her society. She belongs to the domestic sphere of her world and does not have any voice or possibility outside of it.

One of the greatest achievements of *Middlemarch* is the convergence of these seemingly opposite forces in a woman’s life; the epic (the religious) life is set in a domestic setting in Dorothea’s postmarriage plot. Torgovnick remarks that Eliot’s epic vocabulary is more and more used in explaining the domestic life of her characters: “The successful resolution of the plot contains terms that bring together religious and epic vocabulary, and applies them to ordinary ‘everyday life’ . . . bring[ing] closer together the

¹⁴⁶ By “domestic reality,” I do not mean the everyday concerns in relation to home life. After all, as Elizabeth Langland succinctly points out, “Dorothea never speaks to a housekeeper about visitors or meals or schedules either at Tipton or Lowick. She never hires or fires, supervises or instructs. She never even superintends tea” (197). Dorothea’s domestic reality is the narrower realm her society designates for women, the world she lives as a woman in Victorian society. I used the term in Torgovnick’s sense, as opposed to the “epic” in Eliot’s prelude.

epic and domestic levels of life, initially seen as mutually exclusive in the novel” (29).

Dorothea’s religious trajectory is depicted via her domestic life in her postmarriage plot, and *Middlemarch* illustrates how Dorothea’s life successfully conflates the domestic and the epic.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps I need to clarify further what I mean by the religious plot in *Middlemarch*. After all, as Gillian Beer insightfully points out, there is “principled denial of religious comfort in *Middlemarch*” (“What’s Not in *Middlemarch*” 27). Writing “What’s Not in *Middlemarch*,” Beer lists religion among absent topics. Readers living and reading *Middlemarch* in a more secular Victorian world are even denied the nostalgic pleasure of looking back at the 1830s as the decade of unshaken belief:

[I]t’s determined secularism in the portrayal of provincial life denies to 1870s readers even the imagined golden age of undisturbed belief supposedly existing in the 1830s, in the heyday of natural theology, and before the intervening tumult of enquiry that disturbed their own times. (28)

The absence of religion that 1870s’ readers experienced is heightened by the presence of the novel set in the 1830s, that decade of strong religious feelings, and by the fact that the novel consistently and elusively refuses to give any allusion to firm religious belief but

¹⁴⁷ Of course I am not arguing that Dorothea’s life as a wife is as satisfying or edifying as the other life she might have led. Eliot says, “Certainly those determining acts of her [Dorothea’s] life were not ideally beautiful” (784). However, Dorothea, whose serious nature at first looks down on everyday life as something beneath her concern, grows up to her potential in the domestic setting in the course of her postmarriage and marriage plots. The novel clearly states in the first chapter that Dorothea’s nature is not fit for domestic happiness as a wife: “A young lady of some birth and fortune, who knelt suddenly down on a brick floor by the side of a sick labourer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the time of the Apostles—who had strange whims of fasting like a Papist, and of sitting up at night to read old theological books! Such a wife might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the application of her income which would interfere with political economy and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice before he risked himself in such fellowship. Women were expected to have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on” (9). But as the novel develops, the domestic setting of *Middlemarch* becomes an arena for Dorothea’s passionately religious nature, and Dorothea makes the most of what is allowed for her. In other words, she wins her victory where she is least expected to—in her domestic life.

nevertheless constantly adopts religious languages and images. Dorothea is a “beauty in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in its bosom,” who should be dressed as a “nun,” according to Adolf Naumann, and at different points she is presented as a belated Saint Theresa, Santa Clara, and a Virgin Mary who is out of her time (177). The absence of firm belief and religious comfort conspicuously argues for the necessity of a substitute for religion, that can help Dorothea realize her epic life. The trajectory of Dorothea for her destined epic life is what I call Dorothea’s religious plot, a journey of searching for a meaning in life. Dorothea finds it by elevating her “ethic of care” to the realm of the epic life. I am not arguing that *Middlemarch* employs the traditional religious plot. It simply does not allow such an easy answer for Dorothea’s search. Rather, *Middlemarch* grows out of the rich tradition of the religious-plot novels that combines the marriage and postmarriage plots and becomes a hybrid that retains traces of its parents, yet turns out to be quite a new thing.

Initially Dorothea makes a sharp distinction between the domestic and the epic in her life. The only thing that might hinder Dorothea’s marriage is “her love of extremes, and her insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer, or even might lead her at last to refuse all offers” (9). For Dorothea, “the light of Christianity” is the ultimate criterion with which to judge everyday life, and she initially looks down on domestic concerns as beneath her attention (8). She wears plain dresses because “[s]he could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery” (8). To her, who “retained very childlike ideas about marriage,” marriage is merely a way for her to satisfy “her eagerness to know the truths of life” (10).

Naturally, Dorothea idealizes a husband who is like “the judicious Hooker” or “John Milton,” who is “a sort of father” able to “teach [her] even Hebrew, if [she] wished it” (10). It is a natural consequence that she immediately falls in love with Edward Casaubon, whom she looks upon as “a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge; a man whose learning almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed!” (21). After all, Casaubon reminds Dorothea of “the portrait of Locke,” and Dorothea determines that Casaubon must have “a great soul” (15, 19). In this sense, Dorothea’s marriage is not a conscious gesture to combine the religious with the epic but a complete surrender to the epic life she most ardently yearns for.

The disappointment Dorothea experiences after her marriage is accordingly not of an ordinary nature felt by a girl whose childish dream of marital happiness is cruelly denied in the domestic reality. Rather, Dorothea’s unhappiness results from her realization that Casaubon, to whose feet she “metaphorically,” at least, throws herself, “kissing his unfashionable shoe-ties as if he were a Protestant Pope,” is not who she thought him to be (47). Charles Hatten repeatedly argues that Dorothea uses marriage “as a way of expanding her horizons” and reads her disappointment as a result of “a disastrously unhappy marriage to a domestic tyrant” (181). He calls Dorothea’s marriage “a poignant effort to expand the sphere of her influence and partake in the masculine world of scholarship embodied in Casaubon” (29). However, Dorothea does not seem to entertain such a notion when she marries. She is “too religious for family comfort,” according to her sister Celia Brooke, and her first impression of Casaubon is that “[h]ere was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be

some spiritual communion” (19, 21). She does not seem interested in accessing power through him. If Dorothea desires power, it is spiritual, inward power not that of the secular world. At her first meeting with Casaubon after his proposal and her acceptance (both in letters), she “pour[s] out her joy at the thought of devoting herself to him, and of learning how she might best share and further all his great ends” (46). Dorothea wants a spiritual and intellectual guide, not a ladder to social power, in her husband: “[T]he union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the grandest path” (27).

Before her marriage Dorothea regards Casaubon as “a scholarly god” (Michie 165), “interpreting him as she interpreted the works of Providence, and accounting for seeming discords by her own deafness to the higher harmonies” (68). Casaubon is her new religion. She wants to find a guide who can replace the role of a confessor in an older religious world:

[I]f she [Dorothea] had written a book she must have done it as Saint Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience. But . . . since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr Casaubon?

(80)

Disappointed that she is not as happy as she expected to be on her wedding journey, Dorothea first blames herself for “her own spiritual poverty” that leads her to unnamed grievance (180). However, at the same time, although she “had not distinctly observed,”

she nevertheless “felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband’s mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither” (183). She gradually realizes that Casaubon is not a great soul but a pedantic scholar whose pride dwells on his enormous notebooks he does not even allow her to work on.

Alternately blaming herself for not understanding her new religion enough and fearing that her husband is not the fit spiritual guide she has imagined him to be, Dorothea still thinks that it is possible for her to grasp the epic life through helping Casaubon write the masterpiece of his life, the “Key to all Mythologies” (58). Yet, from her first outburst demanding that she “be more useful” to Casaubon by helping with his notes, she slowly understands that she has placed her faith on a wrong religion: Casaubon cannot lead her to her desired epic life (187). Casaubon is not able to do more than defend his tardy progress by blaming Dorothea as one of the “ignorant onlookers” who, “by a narrow and superficial survey,” dare to judge “the true subject matter” that is “entirely beyond their reach” (188, 189). While Dorothea still states at the end of this first fight on the wedding journey that she “only begged [Casaubon] to let [her] be of some good to [him],” the marital explosion disillusiones Dorothea: “To Dorothea’s inexperienced sensitiveness, it seemed like a catastrophe, changing all prospects” (189). This occasion leads her to look at her only recently affiliated religious position with others’ eyes. Sobbing bitterly, Dorothea is interrupted by an unexpected visit from Will Ladislaw, who eventually helps her to open her eyes about her idealized husband and his great work. From him, Dorothea understands that Casaubon’s works are too late for the world because “new discoveries are constantly making new points of view” in the subject

field Casaubon has chosen (207). Remonstrating Ladislav about his seemingly indifferent manner in talking about Casaubon's work, Dorothea, however unwittingly, articulates what she has so far only vaguely assumed regarding Casaubon's fate: "Mr Casaubon, of so much goodness, power, and learning, should . . . fail in what has been the labour of his best years" (208).

Dorothea's quest for the epic life, however, does not end with the disappointed marital life, "buried alive" "in that stone prison at Lowick," as Ladislav fears (206). After all, she chose Casaubon because she regarded him as the fitting companion who would help her to learn the truth. Dorothea's desire to learn Latin and Greek "was not entirely out of devotion to her future husband" but also out of her wish to obtain the truth herself, preferably with his help (59): "And she had not reached that point of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a wise husband: she wished, poor child, to be wise herself" (59). And her salvation comes when she devotes her epic ideals to her domestic life. She becomes a true martyr when she still offers her help and care for the now dethroned Casaubon. At the same time, by increasingly becoming an independent soul, she achieves what she has yearned for: the epic/religious life, not apart from everyday life but in the middle of her domestic setting. Contrary to my reading of *Middlemarch* as Dorothea's bildungsroman, Nina Auerbach argues that "Dorothea ends as she began, with her ardor intact to simultaneously possess and renounce" ("Dorothea's Lost Dog" 103). For Auerbach, "the characters in *Middlemarch* change very little; they simply reveal facets of themselves, in large part through the echoing characters who affect our attitudes almost subliminally" ("Dorothea's Lost Dog" 103). However, what is change if it does not mean the development of unrevealed "facets" of characters, that is,

if these traits have existed and been hidden, even from oneself, “through the echoing characters”? Dorothea certainly learns about herself, her needs to lead an epic life, and the meaning of her life through the course of the novel.¹⁴⁸

The abstract desire of Dorothea to do good things in her life becomes a concrete idea, not through Casaubon’s learning, but through Ladislav’s teaching. As Patricia Menon notes, Ladislav “combines a number of features associated with earlier mentor-lovers in [Eliot’s] work” (159). When Dorothea expresses her vague Puritan ideal of her epic life—she “should like to make life beautiful—[she] mean[s] everybody’s life”; “It spoils [her] enjoyment of anything when [she] [is] made to think that most people are shut out from it”—Ladislav penetrates her thoughts, calls Dorothea’s ideal “the fanaticism of sympathy,” and reveals the limits of such notions (205):

If you carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and turn evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to enjoy—when you can. . . . And enjoyment radiates. It is of no use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of when you feel delight—in art or in anything else. . . . I suspect that you have some false belief in the virtues of misery, and want to make your life a martyrdom. (205)

Dorothea does not seem to understand the full implication of Ladislav’s teaching when she first hears it on her wedding journey. Even when Ladislav reiterates his lessons in a

¹⁴⁸ Of course, the conclusion depends on the angle or frame of interpretation one chooses in reading characters. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth states, “[A]s soon as one attempts to make a generalization stick to anything in [Eliot’s] text, there is trouble. This is a difficulty in reading *Middlemarch*. All but the most carefully formulated conclusions about George Eliot seem reversible. No sooner do you say something definitive about her novels than you confront a counterbalancing consideration, a qualifying remark, that inevitable ‘on the other hand’” (112). However, Auerbach mostly reads *Middlemarch* and Dorothea in the marriage plot and postmarriage plot as I do but sees her as an unchanging, unsympathetic wife of Casaubon, who is like Rosamond in a sense, in that they both turn against their husbands’ works without knowing enough to judge; they just “perform wifedom,” and “they too [like the actress Laure] kill their husbands ‘accidentally on purpose’” (“Dorothea’s Lost Dog” 97).

letter that Dorothea reads after Casaubon's first heart attack, the timing prevents her from thinking more about the contents. However, she later appears to incorporate Ladislav's teaching into her vicarious sympathy. She does not deny her enjoyment in the presence of other's suffering anymore. When she befriends Tertius Lydgate in his troubles, persuades others to share her favorable opinions, and helps him through his marital crisis by talking to his wife, Rosamond, she empathizes with Lydgate without harshly judging herself or others who are enjoying their lives. After all, to relieve others' pain and make them happier are Dorothea's main concern as she passionately proposes to her friends and relations that they clear Lydgate's name of calumny: "What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other?" (691). With Ladislav's teaching, she learns to see happiness as something enjoyable, not as something to be Puritanically endured.

Of course, Dorothea does not learn to look at her domestic life as a fit setting to expand her epic ideals from the beginning. When she first comes back from her honeymoon, looking out from her boudoir, she is unable to see her future:

The duties of her married life, contemplated as so great beforehand, seemed to be shrinking. . . . The clear heights where she expected to walk in full communion had become difficult to see even in her imagination; the delicious repose of the soul on a complete superior had been shaken into uneasy effort and alarmed with dim presentiment. When would the days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her husband's life and exalt her own? Never perhaps, as she had preconceived them. (257)

Dorothea also suffers from “the gentlewoman’s oppressive liberty” (257), but she gets rid of depressing thoughts and is able to smile when she spots the miniature of Casaubon’s aunt Julia, a woman with an unfortunate marriage, in her boudoir:

[T]urning away from the window she walked round the room. The ideas and hopes which were living in her mind when she first saw this room nearly three months before were present now only as memories. . . . All existence seemed to beat with a lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry, the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and shrinking away from her. Each remembered thing in the room was disenchanted, was deadened as an unlit transparency, till her wandering gaze came to the group of miniatures, and there at last she saw something which had gathered new breath and meaning: it was the miniature of Mr. Casaubon’s aunt Julia, who had made the unfortunate marriage—of Will Ladislaw’s grandmother. Dorothea could fancy that it was alive now—the delicate woman’s face which yet had a headstrong look, a peculiarity difficult to interpret. (258)

It appears significant that Dorothea takes courage by thinking about another creature who has suffered from her marriage. By being reminded of others who have gone through trials, she turns her eyes outward to reach out. This is the moment when she begins to get involved and resists looking at and brooding over her own misery.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Reading Dorothea as a modern saint, David Carroll sees that “the key turning-point for Dorothea is the Roman honeymoon: before this, she is still seeking in the tradition of her saintly predecessors her own form of ‘illimitable satisfaction,’ while after her renunciation she accepts the fully secularised sainthood of a decentered universe” (243). Clearly, Dorothea’s awakening moment starts in Rome. However, her decision to look out is fully made only when she comes back from her bridal tour to her new home, when she sees herself as a wife, not a bride anymore.

In her study that compares Saint Theresa and Dorothea, Susan Stiritz argues that Dorothea, just as Saint Theresa, undergoes a moment of conversion. Saint Theresa's conversion happens because of her conviction of Jesus's love, and as a result she devotes the rest of her life to reforming her monastic order. According to Stiritz, "Dorothea's conversion" is also caused by love: through her conviction of "her love for Ladislav" (84). From this moment, Stiritz continues, Dorothea "abandons her abstract schemes for societal improvements" by beginning "her work to lessen the common pain wherever she finds it" (85). However, Dorothea only realizes her love for Ladislav—in chapter 80 in this novel with 86 chapters—after she sees him in Rosamond's drawing room. Furthermore, her endeavor to ameliorate others' difficulties and pain starts much earlier in the novel. Soon after Casaubon's first heart attack, Dorothea hears that Ladislav's grandmother Julia was disinherited and generously asks Casaubon to change his will, originally designed to give all to Dorothea, so that it benefits Ladislav. This act, which ironically deepens Casaubon's hatred of Ladislav, comes from a pure desire to help. From this point Dorothea continues to find, however limited, means to relieve others' pain and help them through their trials. After all, "[i]t was not in Dorothea's nature, for longer than the duration of a paroxysm, to sit in the narrow cell of her calamity, in the besotted misery of a consciousness that only sees another's lot as an accident of its own" (740). Dorothea patiently works in the library and does her best to humor Casaubon, even though she knows that the "Key to all Mythologies" will only make an outdated and almost useless contribution to the world if Casaubon finishes it. She even learns to look "at her husband's failure, still more at his possible consciousness of failure," as an occasion when her duty turns to "tenderness" (343).

It is during her “nightmare of a life,” during her trials in marriage, that Dorothea finds a true religion for herself (352). Staying alone with the husband who does not respond to her feeling or to her wishes, Dorothea nevertheless does not confine herself to her own problems. She has “no longings . . . for [herself]” “[e]xcept that [she] should like not to have so much more than [her] share without doing anything for others” (367). Unable to do anything for Ladislav or others due to Casaubon’s opposition, Dorothea still believes that she can fulfill her wishes to be useful to others by “desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don’t quite know what it is and cannot do what we would” because “we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower” (367). For Dorothea, this belief is her new religion, the only way she can realize her epic life:

It [her new belief] is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already. (368)

Dorothea learns that her previous dreams regarding an epic life are distanced from real life, and she now wishes to bring forth changes for the people around her. She refuses to look out on the world “from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator . . . hid[ing] her eyes in selfish complaining” (741). She practices her new religion by looking out and not brooding over her own misery, receiving strength on the way.

Naturally, the more trials she experiences, the more courage and sympathy she comes to have as she tells Ladislav plainly:

If we had lost our own chief good, other people's good would remain, and that is worth trying for. Some can be happy. I seem to see that more clearly than ever, when I was the most wretched. I can hardly think how I could have borne the trouble, if that feeling had not come to me to make strength. (760)

For her, subscribing two hundred pounds a year to the New Hospital is one way to practice her new religion. She almost envies Lydgate for being able to help others in a practical way: "How happy you [Lydgate] must be, to know things that you feel sure will do great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning" (413). After Casaubon's death, she gives the living to Camden Farebrother because he is more likely to do good for the farmers and labourers at Lowick than Mr. Tyke, who is originally recommended to her as "an apostolic man" (465).¹⁵⁰ Now the knowledge Dorothea desires to achieve her epic dreams is not abstract learning such as Latin or Greek but a practical understanding of social need. Discarding theological books and old languages, she gains what she most desires: "a generous sympathy" (718). Sympathy is one way she reaches out to people to make their lives better. Dorothea personifies sympathy when she visits Rosamond to reconcile her with her husband, who is suffering because of calumny. Dorothea explains that she has come because she "felt so much for [Lydgate's] trouble and [Rosamond's]" (747). Dorothea looks at Rosamond's marital life from Rosamond's point of view and comforts her in such a way that Rosamond responds. Giving money or doing great work with her money is another way to reach out for Dorothea. As she repeatedly expresses to Lydgate, whom she financially helps, "[W]hat [she] should most

¹⁵⁰ On recommending Farebrother, Lydgate says, "[T]he best evidence about Farebrother is to see him and hear him" (466). Since Dorothea has already read Mr Tyke's sermons to find that his "sermons would be of no use at Lowick," and since she expresses her intention to see Farebrother and hear his sermon, her decision to give the living to Farebrother must have come from her conviction that Farebrother would act for the benefit of the Lowick people (466).

rejoice at would be to have something good to do with [her] money,” because “[she] should like it to make other people’s lives better to them” (720). Her thwarted plan to establish “a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work should be done well” also lies at the root of her desire to help others with the practical aspects of life (517). For her, the only guideline of her new religion is to live for others. She exclaims, “How can we live and think that any one has trouble—piercing trouble—and we could help them, and never try?” (747).

With opened eyes in her postmarriage plot, Dorothea becomes “altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that Key which had made the ambition and the labour of her husband’s life” (449). The “Key to all Mythologies” has been a Bible for Dorothea Brooke; now as Dorothea Casaubon, she comes to disbelieve the doctrine that has dominated her husband’s life. Robert Kiely notes that George Eliot, who inherited Ludwig Feuerbach’s deep interest in language, believed that “[t]he object of the word is communication, its life is dialogue” (104).¹⁵¹ In this sense, the facts that Casaubon’s ideas about the “Key to all Mythologies” are buried in his mind and not shared, even with his wife, until he is compelled to do so right before his death and that his book, even if it were published, would be unread, as its topics are no longer interesting, are consummate indicators that reveal Casaubon as the epitome of “the deadening effect of intense attachment to the antique and the inalienable” (Freedgood 133). Confined to the past and past doctrines and unable and unwilling even to share these past ideas, Casaubon, “the personification of the dead letter,” is an inadequate candidate for Dorothea’s spiritual guidance (Hertz 153). In her marriage, Dorothea’s mind yearns for true companionship

¹⁵¹ Also see Shuttleworth, *George Eliot* for the function of language, especially 147 and 168; Ermarth; and J. Hillis Miller, “A Conclusion.”

with a higher being who would share his ideas for her spiritual growth. The deathlike silence surrounding Casaubon and his supposed masterpiece, “a great work concerning religious history,” allows a possible analogy between the “Key” and religious doctrines of the past, which do not speak to guide later-born Theresas anymore (10). Dorothea’s realization of the futility of the “Key” is her epiphany, a flash of light that turns her search for spiritual guidance from outside, remote ideas to her surroundings, real life around her. She even gives testimony to her unbelief in her note on the envelope that contains Casaubon’s directions: “*Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in?—Dorothea*” (506-07; italics in the original).

The only problem about her new religion is that it does not help her to completely free herself. When she returns from her honeymoon, the narrator describes her as a prisoner: “Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colorless, narrowed landscape” (258). Ladislaw also describes Dorothea’s life in Lowick as imprisoned: “That [Dorothea’s life in Lowick] is a dreadful imprisonment” (367), and he even deplorably says to her directly: “[Y]ou [Dorothea] will go and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick” (206). The narrator also notes that Dorothea has “shut her best soul in prison” to please Casaubon, living “in a virtual tomb” (400, 446). Even though Dorothea knows that she wants to free herself, she does not see the way. The night before Casaubon’s death, when he asks her to “apply [herself] to do what [he] should desire” without condition, arriving at “the conjecture of some intention on her husband’s part which might make a new yoke for her” even after his death, she hesitates to give an answer right away (449). Yet she knows that “she was

fettered” and that she would submit to his merciless demand that binds herself to him for the rest of her life (452).

Later, after hearing about the codicil to Casaubon’s will, “[t]he grasp [that Casaubon has upon her] had slipped away” with her realization that “in her past union there had lurked the hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion” (463, 464). Even after she is free from Casaubon’s “grasp,” however, until she articulates her feelings about Ladislav later, the prison metaphor continues. Her imprisonment of her emotions has continued so long that she suffers from brief delirium and hysteria after Casaubon’s sudden death that happens when she comes to the conclusion that she does not have any choice but to unconditionally submit the rest of her life to his yoke. Summoned to attend her, Lydgate, with a doctor’s penetrating eyes, sees that Dorothea has restrained her feelings too much for a long time and prescribes “perfect freedom” for her (462). Her emotional imprisonment is, of course, from her habitual repression of her mind in her married life: “She was always trying to be what her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she was” (446). But her new religion also contributes to the continuation of the practice because her first lesson in her new religion is to reach out for others and think of others’ needs before hers. She is too faithful to her new religion to moderately practice it, and she appears to think of others’ welfare at the expense of her own feelings: “In her luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, her thought was going out over the lot of others, and her emotions were imprisoned” (715-16). As Lydgate meditates on Dorothea’s generous sympathy after confessing his misfortunes to her, she becomes a Virgin Mary: “This young creature has a heart large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her own future,

and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her” (723).

For her to step down from her Virgin Mary’s pedestal and become an ordinary woman with feelings, she needs to set free her emotions. Ladislav functions as a savior for the imprisoned Dorothea. Her love for Ladislav provides her with the opportunity. “[G]rave yearning was imprisoned within her eyes” until Dorothea’s declaration of her love gives her an opportunity to set herself free (758): “‘Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break,’ said Dorothea, starting from her seat, the flood of her young passion bearing down all the obstructions which had kept her silent—the great tears rising and falling in an instant: ‘I don’t mind about poverty—I hate my wealth’” (762). From their meetings on her wedding journey, Ladislav perceives that Dorothea is “the Aeolian harp” that does not require anybody to make sound (195). Being an active listener who “see[s] more in what she [Dorothea] said than she herself saw,” Ladislav helps Dorothea clarify her vague and abstract epic ideals and play her music outside of her prison (339). Dorothea unreservedly responds to the liberating effects of talking, too. For Dorothea, to “speak without fear to the one person whom she had found receptive” is like “fresh water at her thirsty lips” (341). To Dorothea, who is repeatedly described as imprisoned, Ladislav’s presence is “like a lunette” that “opened in the wall of her [Dorothea’s] prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air” and “the spirit of morning visiting the dim vault where she sat as the bride of a worn-out life” (339, 739).¹⁵² Ladislav humanizes Dorothea’s new religion, which is rigidly practiced at the expense of her emotional freedom.

¹⁵² Not only does Ladislav save Dorothea from her emotional prison; Dorothea rescues Ladislav when he is, figuratively speaking, “on the brink of the grave” when he means to leave her for good (761).

As the new religion of Dorothea successfully enables her to lead an epic life in her domestic setting, the marriage plot of Dorothea and Ladislaw points toward their mutual happiness. Dorothea desires true companionship in her marriage: “It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that poor Dorothea was hungering for” in her marital life (446). The novel describes Ladislaw as the most suitable match for her who would satisfy her yearnings: “He [Ladislaw] was a creature who entered into every one’s feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance” (467). The “Finale” chapter reports that they are happily married, and Dorothea now leads a life that is satisfying both to her emotional needs and to her religious ideals: “No life would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion, and she had now a life filled *also* with a beneficent activity” (782; my emphasis).

However, Dorothea cannot go beyond the limits her gender proscribes. She is “spoken of to a younger generation [in Middlemarch] as a fine girl who married a sickly clergyman, old enough to be her father, and in little more than a year after his death gave up her estate to marry his cousin—young enough to have been his son” (784). Dorothea’s marital trials in her postmarriage plot with Casaubon and her religious plot that makes her realize her epic life in her ordinary life are all put aside in this description, and she is just an old clergyman’s wife who remarried foolishly.¹⁵³ Even in her second marriage, Dorothea is “only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother” (783). The novel also

¹⁵³ Casaubon is “a scholarly clergyman” (66) who actively practices his duties as a rector with the help of a curate. The novel mentions that he, at least occasionally, preaches: “Mr Casaubon did not preach that morning” (444); “He had not been very well that morning, suffering from some difficulty in breathing, and had not preached in consequence” (445). In this sense, Dorothea is the rector’s wife and *Middlemarch* reads as a rare novel with the religious postmarriage plot that allows the reader to see the marital and religious trials in the wife’s perspective.

clearly states that “the conditions of an imperfect social state” contribute to making Dorothea’s life “not ideally beautiful” (784):

A new Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in daring all for the sake of a brother’s burial: the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is for ever gone. (785)

At the same time, the obscurity of Dorothea does not make life meaningless, “for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts” (785). The narrator continues to assert the value of many obscure people who “lived faithfully a hidden life”: that “things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been . . . owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs” (785). Henry Auster confirms this reading: “Dorothea succeeds, however slightly, in shaping the world more in accordance with the vision of her ardent imagination than it was when she found it” (97). Karen Chase notes that there is “Darwinian feminism: a refusal to accept Woman as a fixed essence” in *Middlemarch* (*George Eliot* 14). In this sense, Dorothea’s trajectory from a girl who aspires to a pure epic life to a woman who faithfully endeavors to realize her epic ambitions within her limited situation shows that “Eliot sees Dorothea not merely as the latest, the most up-to-date, example of the fixed Theresan essence, but as the representative of a species transformed by her encounters with a changing environment” (Chase, *George Eliot* 15):

Dorothea Brooke, obliged to live outside a time and place in which she might flourish, obliged rather to live in the unpropitious circumstances of the early nineteenth century, can be neither simply a member of her noble kind, nor simply

an individual. She is a hybrid, whose suffering and whose greatness derive from the fact that human beings cannot surrender themselves to their eternal essences but must live and change in history. (Chase, *George Eliot* 15)

Dorothea's triumph and the meaning of her life come from her being faithful to her religious ideals, even in her wretched marital life with Casaubon, and growing up to her potential despite her socially disabled position as a woman in Victorian society. Sally Shuttleworth argues that "George Eliot draws on the organic principle of interdependence, by which movement of each part affects the whole, to suggest that Dorothea's life will determine the future development of the entire social organism" (*George Eliot* 173-74). Although her argument shows that Shuttleworth correctly comprehends the meaning of Dorothea's life suggested by Eliot, Shuttleworth seems to forget that Dorothea as an organism has less opportunities than her male counterparts do in her society.

Dorothea's presence in *Middlemarch* as a girl with much potential ending up as "a creature . . . absorbed into the life of another" (783) has led many critics to ask with Suzanne Graver, "How feminist a work is *Middlemarch*?" (64). While critics such as Charles Hatten, Kimberly VanEsveld Adams, Dorice Williams Elliott, and Elizabeth Langland regard Dorothea as "a thwarted St. Theresa" who chooses marriage as an instrument to achieve her ambitions (Adams 195), other critics like Gillian Beer, Karen Chase, Henry Auster, J. Hillis Miller, and Suzanne Graver provide a more balanced reading of the novel, presenting Dorothea as a woman who realizes her ideals, however humbly, in the sphere allowed to her.¹⁵⁴ Pointing out the importance of Evangelicalism in

¹⁵⁴ Although Stiritz provides a feminist reading of *Middlemarch* in her interesting article that closely compares Saint Theresa and Dorothea, I did not include her among more balanced critics of *Middlemarch*;

young Eliot's life, Graver argues that Eliot "explores through Dorothea the complex and ambiguous legacies of evangelical feminism" (67). According to Graver, although "evangelical Christianity" is not easily recognized as feminist because it emphasizes the moral influence of woman that she can exercise in her sphere, it shares ideas of modern feminist tradition that emphasize women's different voice and ethic of care (67).¹⁵⁵ In this sense, "the 'Finale' places into final perspective both the evangelical doctrine of woman's moral influence and the liberal feminist concern with self-fulfillment. Dorothea's benevolent influence on others is celebrated, but her failure to mark out for herself a life of public achievement is mourned" (73).¹⁵⁶

Reading *Middlemarch* as an antifeminist novel is detaching Dorothea from her Victorian society and criticizing her subdued voice in the context of a later period. At the same time, reading it as a strongly feminist novel is reading beyond the text. Alexander Welsh notes that "[t]he frame of *Middlemarch*, notwithstanding its appeal to Saint Theresa and the many Theresas of yesterday and today, ought not to be read as a strictly gendered set of observations" (67). Along with Welsh I suggest reading it with a more

and although she sees "Eliot's contribution to her era's discussion of both the Woman Question and its connection with the spiritual needs of the era" by closely studying Saint Theresa's life and works and applying them to Dorothea, her conclusion simply presents Dorothea as a helpless and passive victim of her society: "Eliot depicts heroic options available to women in Victorian England as nonexistent" (79). For Beer's views, see *George Eliot* 180. For J. Hillis Miller's discussion, see his "A Conclusion": "Dorothea fulfills herself by becoming a wife and mother. This destiny is hardly an argument for women's liberation. Nevertheless, in the subtle and pervasive dismantling of male claims to a divinely grounded authority in storytelling as well as in the conduct of life, and in the replacement of this by what might be called a feminine mode of narration, George Eliot, in spite of her masculine pseudonym, or rather because of what she does with it, is one of the most powerful of feminist writers" ("A Conclusion" 151).

¹⁵⁵ Talking about the Eliot classes she has taught, Graver writes, "[S]tudents fault the rationalist Enlightenment tradition for incorporating a male standard and devaluing women's experience, and they praise George Eliot for writing a 'home epic' and Dorothea for embracing an ethic of care. . . . These students are likely to cite Carol Gilligan's work in psychology and ethical development" (66).

¹⁵⁶ Although Graver says that "*Middlemarch* legitimizes, as well as challenges, Victorian cultural paradigms," I believe Eliot strongly urges her readers to question those paradigms. After all, as Graver herself points out, "Writers cannot help but call on the same signifying codes that pervade social interactions, even when they seek to challenge those codes" (73).

egalitarian lens, to see how both women and men make the best choices in their given circumstances. Many male characters also fail to realize their goals in life, and as in cases of Casaubon, Lydgate, and Nicholas Bulstrode, their struggles are often depicted in their postmarriage plots. Dorothea comes to embody the “ethic of care” by nurturing those around her both through her postmarriage plot and through the religious plot.

Underneath *Middlemarch* lies the rich tradition of the marriage/postmarriage religious novel tradition. The genius of Eliot is that she combines both the postmarriage plot and the marriage plot to trace how Dorothea achieves her religious ideals in her home life. The “Finale” notes that “[m]arriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning,” and “[i]t is still the beginning of the home epic” (779). By the end of both the marriage plot and the postmarriage plot of Dorothea, Eliot presents “a new vision, promoting synthesis, not dualism” by combining the epic and the home (Graver 69). Dorothea’s religious trajectory leads her to serve others on a practical basis and enlarges her capacity for sympathy:

Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago I [Dorothea] had no notion of that—I mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands, and makes us silent when we long to speak. I used to despise women a little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up. (512)

In her postmarriage plot Dorothea learns to be generous to others, especially to women. Enriching others’ lives around her with her humbled mind and careful attention becomes the consummation of the epic ideals in a later-Theresa’s life. “Home epic” is not only the marker of the happy fusion of two opposing elements in Dorothea’s earlier life but also a

great tribute to the lives of later-born, obscure Theresas who have been heroically faithful both to their nature and their social roles. Without the religious plot Dorothea's married life would be just that of another disappointed young wife, and she would remain a petty example or a tragic heroine who vainly struggles against the social limits her gender proscribes. Dorothea's marriage to Ladislaw would read as merely "the best that can be done with her life within the lamentable circumstances of nineteenth-century England," although, "the reader is encouraged to believe, [Dorothea] made the only possible good choice, given her historical placement" (Hillis Miller, "A Conclusion" 145).¹⁵⁷

On the other hand, but for the postmarriage plot, domestic life never would have had the full attention of Dorothea, who was accustomed to draw a sharp line between the everyday life and the epic ideals before she married Casaubon. The happy marriage plot of Dorothea and Ladislaw gives her a second chance to live "the home epic" that she learned in her first marriage and in her epic/religious struggles. As mentioned in chapter 2, religious novels present their stories as universal experiences that most contemporary people go through every day. *Middlemarch* renders the epic/religious experience of Dorothea universal by allowing her to realize her epic/religious potentials in everyday life, at home.

Barry Qualls insightfully notes that Eliot wrote in the age of lost faith as a writer who could not yet think or write without the language of faith:

Tellingly, the author who represented to her generation what the novel could accomplish did not write, did not think, without the texts that she abandoned when she lost her faith, without the language of the Bible and the traditions that

¹⁵⁷ For J. Hillis Miller, Dorothea is Ariadne and Ladislaw is Dionysus and "Dorothea's marriage to Will [Ladislaw] in *Middlemarch* is George Eliot's interpretation of the myth of Ariadne and Bacchus" ("A Conclusion" 148).

formed around it, without the histories of its texts that she transformed into contexts and structures for the lives of her characters. Her history of religious engagement is a history of Victorian England's engagement with God and the Bible. (119-20)

Dorothea's life search for an epic life is her search for an alternative to religion. Read apart from the rich tradition of the religious novel genre, Dorothea's struggle to be true to her epic ideals, even after her first disastrous marriage, loses more than half of its meanings. The postmarriage-plot tradition is, after all, very closely related to the religious-novel genre. David Carroll sees that Dorothea's vocation is to become a modern saint, and she realizes it through her relationship with Casaubon and Ladislav: "We can now see that Dorothea's path to her vocation is through an understanding of these two men [Casaubon and Ladislav] and their complementary relationship" (248). As Carroll notes, "The agony of the dark night of the soul is traditionally the discovery of God through his absence" (251). In her "nightmare," her marriage to Casaubon, she finds a new form of religion that can sustain her. In the night of agony after she sees Ladislav and Rosamond together in a fashion that seems to confirm gossip about their relationship, Dorothea experiences "the dark night of the soul" again, this time literally: "In that hour she repeated what the merciful eyes of solitude have looked on for ages in the spiritual struggles of man . . . she lay on the bare floor and let the night grow cold around her; while her grand woman's frame was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing child" (739). The next day, however, after spending the night, Dorothea confirms not only her religion of care but also her love for Ladislav. The passage reveals how dominantly pervasive the Victorian marriage/postmarriage religious novel tradition was.

In this sense, Dorothea's second visit to Rosamond is a scene where "the spiritual madonna" comes to help "the worldly magdalene" (Carroll 252). Dorothea's "pilgrimage" is invariably told in close relation with her marriage and postmarriage plots (Carroll 253). Qualls points that "The Bible's tropes and language *and* its religion [in Eliot's works] recalled readers to their heritage of faith and its language and sounds, and to the developing history of that heritage" (136; italics in the original). Eliot's *Middlemarch* sharpens the distinction between the early decades of faith and the later years of doubt by setting the novel in the 1830s' Middlemarch, where religion is no longer a center, by writing the story of no religion (in a traditional sense) in biblical language and with biblical allusions, and by heavily relying on the religious-novel tradition. In this sense, *Middlemarch* is one of the legitimate heirs of the VRN, written in the later decades of the nineteenth century, in the "age of faith and doubt."

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